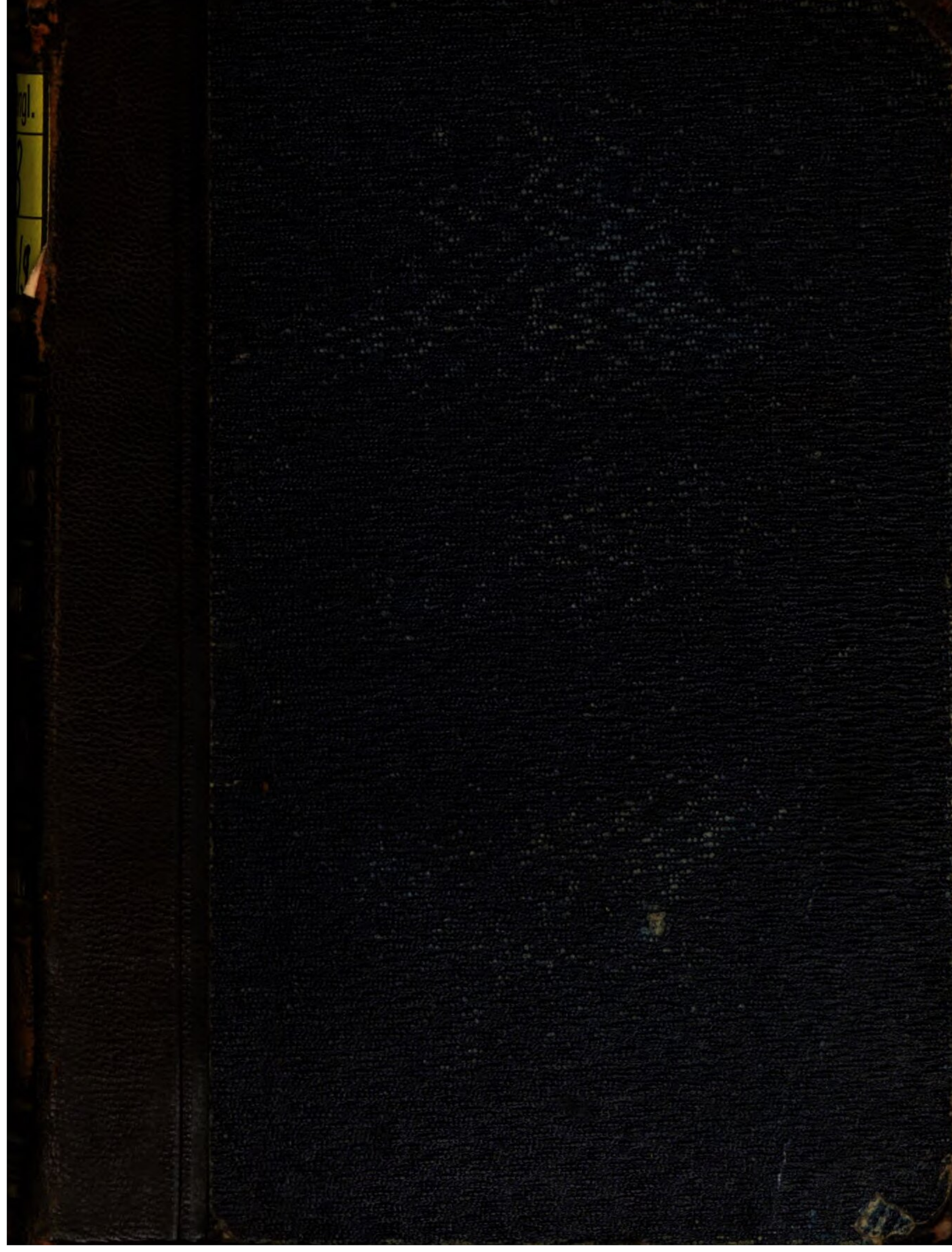

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COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. LXXXV.

THE STEP-MOTHER BY G. P. R. JAMES.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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MUENCHEN

THE STEP-MOTHER.

A ROMANCE.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES.

SANCTIONED BY THE AUTHOR FOR CONTINENTAL CIRCULATION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE STEP-MOTHER.

CHAPTER I.

In a certain county of England, which cannot exactly be called a midland county, because at one point it comes within a few miles of the sea, there is a village, with a somewhat detailed description of which I must trouble the reader; and, moreover, I must beg him, as he proceeds, to mark all the particulars, and to remember them throughout, for in this village and its immediate neighbourhood took place the principal incidents of the story about to be told. The scene is narrow, certainly, but very important things are often enacted in a very confined space; and, though amongst the personages to be introduced appear neither kings nor statesmen, yet there are as strong passions moved and as deep interest affected in private life, as in the movements of parties or governments.

The village, then, is situated upon the slope of a hill, and extending from the top to the bottom. A few houses, indeed, are scattered along the valley, by the side of a river, swarming with fine trout; and there, too, in a pleasant and sheltered situation, stands the church, with the clergyman's house, a low roofed but neat and comfortable residence, at the distance of about a hundred yards from the gate of the churchyard.

Half way up the hill is a white house, with a brass knocker on a mahogany door, and the traveller as he passes by, if he be not shut up in a close carriage, may see, through the left-hand window, ranges of bottles and gallipots upon numerous shelves, and a lad, with an apron before him, pounding in a mortar, or pouring liquids from one bottle into another. Written in letters so large that those who run may read, is inscribed upon a brass

plate, "Mr. Nethersole, surgeon, &c.;" and very often, before the door, is seen standing a neat one-horse chaise, with a very respectable, plump, and well-conditioned horse figuring in the harness.

At the top of the hill, and at a short distance from the actual village, is a large red-brick dwelling-house, raised upon a bank formed by the cutting of the high road, along the side of which runs the wall of the extensive and well-stocked garden. The mansion has every appearance of comfort and opulence, the windows are numerous and large, the spaces between wide, the chimneys many — indicating at least twenty rooms possessing the advantage of a fire-place — and the state of repair in which the whole is kept is exact and perfect. A high brick wall, with broken glass bottles upon the top — very unpleasant for the hands of urchins possessed with the spirit of appropriating other people's apples — encircles the premises, containing, perhaps, a couple of acres; and in this wall are three different entrances to the grounds: one a small door, reached by a flight of steps up the bank; another at the north side, presenting two large gates and a gravelled road; and the third on the side directly opposite to the small door above the bank, and communicating with a path, through some pleasant fields and lanes at the back of the village, which leads down to the church and the rectory. I may add, to render the picture complete, that the garden wall and entrance on the north side is sheltered by a fine grove of tall trees from the bleak air of a wide common beyond.

On the other side of the valley, and the river, is another hill, higher, though less abrupt than that on which the village stands. The thick trees of a park, which lies on that side, hide the face of the ground from the lower part of the village; but the windows of the mansion which we have described, looking over these giants of the forest, give a view of the interior of the park and of a fine old grey building, known in that part of the country as "The Hall."

At the time at which the events I am about to relate took place, the Hall was not in the very best state of repair, though by no means dilapidated. The old stones were rather green and mossy;

a part of the copings might be seen here and there suffering from the ravages of time; the doors and windows had not been painted for more than thirty years; and the latter, though perfectly sound, were seldom cleaned. It was a large, rambling, irregular edifice, with a vast door and porch in the old style; many curious, ancient halls within; and having, without beauty, a grand and imposing air, from the gravity of its colouring and from its extent. The park, however, and all that it contained — its long winding walks, the lawn before the house, the broad gravel terrace at the back, the gamekeeper's cottage, the kitchen garden, the very wilderness — regular in its irregularity — were kept with the utmost neatness and propriety. The secret of this difference between the appearance of the house and the grounds, was simply this: the proprietor was a nobleman of somewhat singular character, immersed in the politics of the day, passing the greater part of his time in London, and rarely spending more than six weeks in the course of each year at his house in the country. He was reputed to be avaricious, and was certainly haughty. That he was stern and reserved he made sufficiently apparent during his short residences in that neighbourhood, never associating with any of the gentlemen around, seldom exchanging a word with any one, and when forced to do so upon business, making his communications as laconic as might be. He was, also, it must be remarked, without wife or child, and never brought any party down with him from London to the hall. A cook, a *valet de chambre*, a butler, and a footman, together with a personage who performed the offices of both coachman and groom with the occasional variation of a three-cornered hat and a round one, were the only people who accompanied him; and the old housekeeper, with a coeval housemaid, and a girl from the village hired while he was there and discharged when he was gone, were found sufficient to do the work of the house during his stay.

Thus it will be seen why the dwelling, though not suffered to go to decay, was not kept in a high state of repair. The dining-room, the library, and his own bed-room were the only chambers of which he saw much, and the old housekeeper declared that there was many a room in the house which his lordship had not set his foot in for thirty years. He did not, indeed, take much

greater heed of the arrangements of the park, though he used apparently to find some pleasure in rambling through the wood-walks with his hands behind his back, and his eyes bent upon the ground; but it is much to be doubted whether he would have discovered any little marks of negligence which might have taken place during his absence, had they been apparent. There was one, however, who took a pride in the neatness and propriety of everything about him; and this was the park keeper, a blunt straightforward Englishman, clean and regular in all his habits, doing his duty faithfully and exactly, whether looked after or not, and having no great reverence for any mortal man, so long as he thought he was pleasing God, and satisfying his own conscience.

The poor old housekeeper, who was frightened out of her life at her lord, seldom ventured to point out that this or that required repair, and did so, when absolutely necessary, in so low a voice that she was often interrupted by a cry of "Speak out, woman;" but the park keeper went boldly up to his master whenever anything was wanted, told his story plainly, and generally got what he required. In the management and arrangement of the park, and all that it contained, he took great delight, and often did he say to himself, "If my lord does not choose to live at it, that is his fault; I will keep it fit for him."

The noble owner of the property, however, never rewarded him with any praise of his exertions or any observation upon their success, for, in truth, he never remarked them; coming down, as he called it, for relaxation, and yet bringing all the thoughts and cares of London down with him into the country, so that his mind had no more opportunity of resting upon the things that surrounded him than if he had still been in the capital.

Now, doubtless the reader may imagine that because we have introduced this noble lord before any one else to his notice, and have spoken of himself and his dwelling somewhat at large, we intend to make him one of the principal characters in the story, and introduce him frequently upon the stage; but such is not at all the case. You have seen him, dear reader, and you will never see him again. You may, indeed, hear his name mentioned, but he will never more appear upon the stage. It was

necessary, nevertheless, that you should know to whom that park and mansion belonged, and what was its state and condition, though in what way any of these particulars affected the course of events about to be detailed, the story itself must show.

The large red house, which, as we have seen, was pitched upon the top of the opposite hill, was possessed by a gentleman as different in every respect from the owner of the Hall as it is possible to conceive; and we must go some way back to trace his history before the actual commencement of the tale; for this chapter must be taken as a sort of proem or introduction to what is to follow, in which (notwithstanding the great poet's hint to plunge into the middle of events, and leave the preceding circumstances to be explained afterwards) I wish to gather all that might be cumbersome or difficult in after details. The gentleman of whom I now speak was the son of a lawyer, who had risen to eminence in his profession, and obtained a seat upon the bench. The judge had not died very wealthy, however, and his eldest son followed his father's course, till he was elevated to the office of one of the Barons of the Exchequer; but the second and youngest, whose history we are about to hear, after having pursued a course of liberal education till he was about eighteen, was then placed in the house of a great merchant, and in due time became a partner in the firm. He was well to do when his father died, and the sum which he then shared with his brother made some addition to a fortune already considerable. He was a quiet, unobtrusive, and somewhat timid man, but clear-sighted in most cases, and possessed of a fund of strong good sense, which would have been very serviceable to himself and others, had he not been withal, if not indolent, at all events very fond of peace and tranquillity. He had a great aversion to strong emotions of any kind, loved the ordinary course of business, was as great an enemy to adventurous speculation as the oldest partner in the house, and a great deal more so than the youngest. He did, however, make one bold speculation; and it proved a successful one — he married, and, having chosen well, had every reason to be satisfied. His wife had everything but one to recommend her: she was very handsome, she was a lady by birth, and, what is of far more im-

portance, by nature; she had accomplishments enough to make time pass pleasantly, and to bear her full part in interesting and entertaining others; and she had a kind and affectionate heart, as well as a strong sense of all the duties of life. This was everything that he wanted, and though her fortune was very small, he paid no attention to that point. Though a very good-looking man, Mr. Charlton was nearly forty when he committed this act, and his days passed in uninterrupted tranquillity for about ten years, with wealth increasing, a happy home, a cheerful and amiable companion, and one fair daughter, "whom he loved passing well."

But his felicity was to have a turn, and in one week he lost his brother, for whom he had always entertained a deep affection, and his wife, to whom he was bound by all the strongest bonds of the heart. The Baron of the Exchequer had never married, always declaring that he had no time; and consequently his wealth, which was considerable, devolved to his brother. But the disaster which Mr. Charlton had sustained affected him deeply; and, though he lingered on for about a year and a half in London, he was seized with a great distaste for business, and began to talk of retiring upon the ample means he possessed. Perhaps this design might have passed away had not the younger partners of the house overruled the elder, and entered into a speculation which seemed to the more prudent members of the firm, extremely hazardous, and which proved somewhat detrimental, though to no very great extent. It acted, however, in deciding both the gentlemen who had opposed the scheme to retire, which they consequently did, and Mr. Charlton, after having sought through various parts of the country for a house to suit him, pitched his tent upon the top of the hill which, with its dependent village, I have already described.

He carried with him into the country his daughter, all his old servants, many of his old habits, his powdered hair and his pigtail, though a renowned minister had nearly banished powder from society some years before, and royalty itself had set its face against all manner of queues.

His daughter was by this time about ten years of age, and had

already received such an education from her mother as to ensure a good foundation for whatever afterwards might be done to improve her mind. She had by inheritance her mother's heart and warm affections; and for two years after their arrival in the country, her father devoted himself entirely to cultivate her understanding, and give her right and just views of everything on which she might be called to exercise her judgment. I have already said that he was a man of strong good sense, and that quality went so far as to teach him his own prevailing fault, though not to correct it. Men of clear minds but of no great decision of character are generally given to analyse scrupulously their own feelings and motives — to examine as with a microscope their own character as an object which they can pause on and contemplate without fear or trouble. The result of their research may be right or wrong, according to their powers of intellect; but the investigation is still going on, and has but this inconvenience, that from that which they discover in themselves, they are apt to judge of the conduct and motives of others. The bolder and firmer analyser of the characters of those who surround him, escapes, perhaps, that error, but is likely to fall into the still greater one of not knowing himself.

Mr. Charlton, however, was of the former class; and in turning his mind inward, like the eyes of the sages of Laputa, he saw and acknowledged that he had too strong an inclination to do many things, in order to save himself trouble and annoyance, which his judgment condemned; and he strove diligently to impress upon his daughter's mind, to judge rightly at first, and to adhere to her decision when once it was formed. He did not fear to render her obstinate or headstrong by such lessons, for her character was naturally gentle and yielding, like that of her mother; and he also guarded it with all care, by showing the necessity of using every power of the mind to insure that the course we choose be the right one. Thus were formed within the bosom of Louisa Charlton certain principles of action which proved her safeguard at an after period, and the good sense of her father turned his very faults to her advantage.

Although the education of his child, the arrangement of his dwelling, the improvement of his grounds, and the various

amusements of country life, afforded Mr. Charlton some occupation, and at first filled up his time to his satisfaction, yet after the first little bustle of the change was over, he began to feel lonely and listless. Two great losses were felt in his course of life, business and society. He had no companion — he had no constant employment. When he had quitted London he had felt that every object which he saw around him in his dwelling, recalled the memory of her he had lost; and though it was not forgetfulness he sought, it was to escape having painful remembrances continually forced upon him. Now, however, he would often have given much to have recalled his hasty decision, for though grief subsided gradually, as it does, somewhat too rapidly, indeed, with those who may be termed easy-minded people, he felt the want of the companionship to which he had been accustomed, and the employment which had become natural to him, more and more every hour. He might often be seen walking up and down the longest gravel walk in the garden, with his hands crossed behind him, and his eyes bent sadly upon the ground. Then he would roam out into the country, or take a quiet canter upon his round, short-legged horse, or drive out with his daughter to see some object of interest in the neighbourhood; but still at his return he would fall again into listlessness.

The village afforded no society except that of the clergyman of the parish, the surgeon, and the lawyer. The former was an amiable, learned, and thoughtful man, doing all his duties well and zealously; but, having long been accustomed to live almost totally without society himself, he had lost the taste for it, and spent his time either with his books, in the cottages of his inferior parishioners, or in dispensing justice, healing quarrels, and deciding differences, in his capacity as a magistrate. Thus, although he was always very happy to see Mr. Charlton, every now and then returned his visits, dined with him once or twice, and showed a strong prepossession in favour of his daughter, he did little to supply the place of all that the worthy gentleman had lost, or given up.

The surgeon was still less serviceable in this respect; he was a busy little man, clever in his profession, active, bustling, round,

fat, and generally dressed in knee breeches and black silk stockings. He was always cheerful, especially when he could rub his hands, and say to a brother practitioner in the neighbourhood, "A pretty sprinkling of fever about, Mr. Stubbs;" or when an epidemic cold, or influenza as we should now call it, hurried him rapidly from house to house through the whole of his district; but he was too busy, too small in mind, and too full of rhubarb, magnesia, jalap, and colomel, to be any companion for a man of high intellect and wide information such as Mr. Charlton. He did, indeed, occasionally dissipate half an hour by bringing him the news of the neighbourhood, and sometimes more effectually interested him by introducing to his notice a case of distress, to which the heart and the purse of the worthy gentleman were always equally open.

The lawyer afforded still less sources of amusement or interest; he was a shrewd, clever, calculating, very silent man; each word that he uttered, and they were very few, was well weighed and pondered, although he had the reputation of occasionally helping his neighbours into disputes, from which it required his own assistance to deliver them; but, nevertheless, whatever he did in this way was well considered, and he seemed on all occasions to ask himself before a sentence was suffered to pass his lips, whether it was actionable. With him Mr. Charlton was often obliged to act in matters of business, but their intercourse went no farther, though the lawyer was always profoundly civil to his wealthy neighbour.

Though there were several other persons, in various ranks of life, living at the distance of a few miles, some of whom I may have occasion to introduce to the reader at an after period, these three formed the only society that the village of Mallington afforded, and the very retired and quiet situation which had been its great attraction in the eyes of Mr. Charlton at first, now proved a source of discomfort to him.

It is not improbable, indeed, that, under these circumstances, he might, sooner or later, have returned to London, and, indeed, he was beginning to argue himself into a belief that the masters which he procured for his daughter from a large town, about seven

miles distant, were not so good as could be desired, when an event occurred which changed the whole course of his ideas, and fixed him on the spot where he was. But I must not introduce an important character at the end of the chapter; and the one who is now about to appear, well deserves a clear stage and no favour.

CHAPTER II.

In walking up the village of Mallington, from the rectory towards the mansion which was called Mallington House, we forgot to notice the linen-draper's shop, kept by two maiden sisters, somewhat past their prime, but very respectable women in their way. They were, it is true, rather apt to inquire into and report the affairs of their neighbours; but this must not be attributed to them as any great sin, for, to say truth, the village afforded so few sources of amusement that, as they neither fished, shot, nor hunted, they had very little else to do during, at least, three quarters of their time. The Misses Martin, then, employed a portion of each day in settling the business of every one in the place, and as their tongues were somewhat feared, and they had the reputation of being wealthy, they were courted by their neighbours, invited to take tea at the surgeon's, and held a hand at cards with the solicitor. They were, however, thrifty people, notwithstanding the elevated position they held in the society of the place, served in their own shop, and let the first floor and part of the second, when any one seeking a pure and salubrious air came down to find it at Mallington.

One afternoon, then about two o'clock, in the spring of the third year which Mr. Charlton spent in the country, a post-chaise drove into the village, and stopped at the little public-house — for it could not be called an inn — called the Bagpipes, which had been established from time immemorial at the end of the street nearest the rectory.

The Misses Martin went to the door of their shop and looked out; but they could discover nothing but that a lady in mourning and a boy of about thirteen got out of the vehicle, and entered the place of public entertainment. After they had paused for a minute

to see, what more? — they returned into the shady retreat formed by cloths and printed calicoes, and were busily engaged in wondering who the strangers could be, when the lady and the boy walked with a slow and sauntering pace up the street, looking at the houses on each side of the way as they came.

"Lor, Mathilda," cried the eldest Miss Martin, as she saw them pass, "perhaps they are looking for lodgings. Tell Sally to put up the bill."

The younger sister hastened to obey, and then passed out between two pieces of muslin to see the further proceedings of the visitors.

"I declare they have gone into Dixon's," she cried; "the creature keeps her bill up always; but I am sure they will never be contented with that nasty place."

"If they are," said Miss Martin, in the true philosophical spirit of a certain fox who once had to do with the fruit of the vine, "they would not suit us, that 's clear."

In about a quarter of an hour, however, the strangers came down the hill again, looking about them as before, and, much to the satisfaction of the two ladies in the shop, they walked in as soon as they perceived the bill. Inquiries were made — the rooms to be let were looked at; no haggling about the price took place, but some additional conveniences were required, and, especially, a fourth room for a servant. All was promised by the Misses Martin that the lady demanded, and the next day she and her son were safely installed in the apartments over the shop, with a private door, *quite to themselves*. A prim and tidy girl was hired to wait upon them till the lady's own servant could come down from London; and several costly articles of dress, with a handsome dressing-case, fitted up with silver, a writing desk to correspond, and numerous applications to know where certain luxuries and conveniences were to be procured, showing habits of expense, if not affluence, convinced the Misses Martin that they had obtained as their tenants a very respectable family indeed.

The lady herself did not look more than two or three and thirty, although she was dressed in the unbecoming garb of widowhood

— not, indeed, in deep weeds, for her fine flaxen hair was shown, but in such garments as many a woman feels inclined to wear long after the customs of the country require her to bear about the external signs of her bereavement. She was a very pretty woman, moreover, with bright blue eyes, fine teeth, a good complexion, soft clear skin, a chin somewhat too prominent perhaps, a beautiful hand and arm, and as smart a foot and ankle as ever were seen. She was tall, and though not absolutely graceful — for real grace depends as much upon the mind as upon the body — yet she was well formed, plump, but not stout, with a very charming fall of the neck and shoulders, and a waist of a mere span. Her son was, as we have said, about twelve or thirteen years of age, with his mother's complexion and features; tall, strong, and active, but with something unpleasant in the expression of his face, which it was difficult to account for. His forehead was, indeed, rather low, the back of the head large, and there was a wild, rash expression about the eyes and mouth, which made the elder Miss Martin somewhat apprehensive of her tables and chairs. In every other respect he was a handsome, good-looking boy; and no sooner was he in the house than out again down to the stream, over the hill, and through the lanes, leaving his mother to arrange their rooms to her own taste, and take the trouble of unpacking the numerous trunks and portmanteaus which had been crowded upon the chaise.

Though the lady herself seemed a little thoughtful as she proceeded with this task, Miss Mathilda Martin, who gave her every assistance in her power — to see what was contained in the packages — remarked that she could occasionally laugh with a gay and merry laugh, as if she had once been possessed with what is called, in vulgar parlance, the spirit of fun, and as if, moreover, that spirit had not yet entirely gone out of her. She acquired also, even before her sister, various pieces of information of which she was desirous, and, amongst them, the name that was engraved upon the boxes, which, as they had been carried up under the lady's own eye, she had not previously been able to discover. There it stared her in the face, every trunk that was opened, "The Hon. Mrs. Latimer," and with this grand intelli-

gence, she hurried down to inform her sister, as soon as she had satisfied her curiosity in other respects.

Now, had Mrs. Latimer lodged at Dixon's, and had the good mistress of the house ventured to attach Honourable to her name, the two Misses Martin would instantly have pronounced the lady an impostor, and asked, with a triumphant sneer, whether lord's daughters ever travelled without a single servant in yellow post-chaises, and had but one maid, who was left in London? But Mrs. Latimer was their own lodger; and that made a wonderful difference. She was for the time a part and parcel of themselves; and their importance, the very importance of their lodging, was vastly increased by the Hon. Mrs. Latimer lodging there. They looked forward into futurity; they thought of speaking for many years to all persons viewing the rooms, of their last lodger, "the Hon. Mrs. Latimer;" they even saw a likelihood of mentioning her to their acquaintances, in more familiar conversation, as their friend "the Hon. Mrs. Latimer, who had been spending a few weeks with them."

The self-same night they told it to Mr. Nethersole and to their neighbours, right and left; and when, on the day but one after, the lady herself appeared at church, everybody was prepared to open the door of his pew to give her admission; and all declared that she was a very beautiful creature, and looked "quite the lady." She was ushered, however, by the clerk into the rector's pew, which, as he had no wife, and his sister was absent, generally stood vacant. Her demeanour was composed and decorous; she looked little around her, except once, when a man in the gallery began to play upon a hautboy, beginning with a dismal squeak, to lead the congregation in singing; and, to do them justice, they followed him exactly in the same tone. She then turned round with an expression of surprise, but speedily fixed her eyes upon her book with a grave look, and joined the rest, though with more music in her tones than the other members of the choir. Her son did not, indeed, preserve the same decent solemnity, but laughed aloud; and to say truth, through the whole service displayed a sort of indifferent, careless inattention, which would have shocked the good clergyman not a little, but that

luckily, both in the pulpit and the reading desk his back was turned upon his own pew. The next seats, however, were those of Mr. Charlton and his daughter; and the worthy gentleman remarked his young neighbour's want of decorum with displeasure; but as he walked up the hill after church he perceived, well satisfied, that the fair widow, who was just before him, spoke seriously and evidently in a monitory tone to her son, who, for his part, held down his head and said nothing.

About a week after this occurrence, in writing to a friend in London, Mr. Charlton added in a postscript the following words:— "We have had an addition lately to the society of our little village, which, indeed, it much needed: a widow lady who styles herself, or whom the people where she lodges style, the Honourable Mrs. Latimer. I have fallen into a sort of acquaintance with her; but before I enter into anything like what people in general call friendship, I would fain know who she is, and something more of ner history. See if you can find out, in case you cannot tell me yourself."

An answer to the letter came in the course of a few days, and on this head the writer afforded full information. Mrs. Latimer, he said, if it was the same person he meant, was a young widow, formerly the wife of the Honourable Captain Latimer, wo had been a gay reckless young fellow, and had terminated a career of thoughtless folly and extravagance by shooting himself one morning in his dressing-room about two years before.

"She is but poorly provided for, I believe," continued the writer, "for his family disapproved of the match, as she was the daughter of a singing master; and though she has always conducted herself with perfect propriety, they do nothing for her, so that she only has the interest of a younger brother's fortune, sadly shattered as he left it. Frederic Harvey, who has seen her, says she is a monstrous fine woman."

All these particulars roused Mr. Charlton's best feelings in her behalf. He pitied her deeply for the shock and distress which her husband's rash conduct must have inflicted; he felt sympathy for her, and indignation at her husband's family for the harshness with which they had treated a person who, placed in difficult cir-

cumstances, had always acted with perfect propriety; and he compassionated a lady who, probably accustomed to affluence, and even luxury, had been so suddenly reduced to very inferior circumstances; and he admired her for the equanimity and right feeling with which she bore the reverse, and adapted her style of living to her means.

A passing bow or an occasional word was all that had yet taken place between Mr. Charlton and Mrs. Latimer, but he now walked down to call upon her, with the determination of showing her every attention in his power. The lady received him with grave politeness, thanked him for his civility, and easily smoothed down the first roughnesses of new acquaintance. She talked well and sensibly upon various subjects; never referred in the most remote degree to her own state and station, but spoke a good deal of Miss Charlton, and praised her beauty and grace of demeanour with discrimination and delicacy.

Mr. Charlton went away even better pleased with what he had seen than with what he had heard, felt convinced that the society of such a person would be of great advantage to his daughter, and, after some hesitation, determined to ask her to dinner, taking care to invite some of the distant neighbours, who had wives and daughters, to meet the fair widow at his house. To her he bore the important request in person, and prefaced it by some apology in regard to having no lady of the house to receive her.

Mrs. Latimer smiled somewhat sadly, replying, "Oh, my dear Sir, when people come to our time of life, and have seen many sorrows, though they may have lost many bright things with youth, yet they have gained freedom from those restraints which youth is wisely, though unwillingly, forced to impose upon itself."

"Our time of life, my dear Madam!" said Mr. Charlton, shaking his head, "you must not class yourself with the good old people yet."

"Oh! I am older than I look," replied the lady, "and look, I am afraid, younger than I could wish. But to speak to your invitation, my dear Sir. I really seldom go out. Indeed, I have not been anywhere since — since — for a long time, I mean."

"Nay, I will take no denial," rejoined Mr. Charlton, kindly; "and your young gentleman must come up, and amuse himself as well as he can."

"You are very kind," said Mrs. Latimer, thoughtfully; "but really — yet, for the boy's sake, I must get rid of such feelings of reluctance."

"Certainly, my dear Madam," replied Mr. Charlton; "you have duties which must be performed, and it is far better not to suffer feelings, however natural — however laudable — to interfere with their execution at the commencement. I shall count upon you, then, and will now take my leave."

The day of the dinner arrived. After some of the more distant guests had made their appearance, Mrs. Latimer was announced. She was dressed more plainly than usual; her widow's cap was brought further over her face; her hair was less shown. She was grave, too, and seemed a little agitated; but if such was the case, Mr. Charlton's kindness and good breeding soon put her at her ease, and everybody showed her attention and civility, for her worthy host had communicated to those in the room what he had heard regarding the propriety of her conduct, and the sad circumstances in which she was placed. Before dinner and after dinner she showed great fondness for Miss Charlton, talked with her, smiled upon her, and admired in her to her father all those things which Mr. Charlton himself most admired in his child.

In the course of the evening there was some music; several of the young ladies were requested to sing; and one of them, after having done so, inquired if Mrs. Latimer would not favour them in the same way. She answered that she never sang anything but sacred music now; but she was prevailed upon to try a song from some favourite oratorio of the day, and nothing could be more beautiful than the manner in which she executed the task. It was chaste, high-toned, and sweet, without any effort or exuberant ornament, and every one listened, rapt and delighted till it was done, when a murmur of applause spread through the room.

From that day Mrs. Latimer became a great favourite in the neighbourhood, and several invitations to dinner immediately

followed, but she had chosen her course by this time, and replied, without concealment, that her means were too limited to admit of her going out far for society. In one or two instances, a kindly — though, perhaps, considering the shortness of the acquaintance, not a very delicate — spirit prompted the inviters to send their own carriages for her; and in these cases she accepted. She also went out to several other dinner parties to which Miss Charlton was invited, taking a place in Mr. Charlton's carriage; but her principal intimacy was at Mallington House, and circumstances soon arose to make her almost a daily visitor there, as I shall proceed to explain.

CHAPTER III.

It very often happened, during the month or two which followed, that Mr. Charlton, sometimes accompanied by his daughter sometimes alone, dropped in for half an hour in the morning, to see how Mrs. Latimer and her son were going on; and on more than one occasion the conversation turned upon the education of children, in regard to which the lady seemed to have thought deeply, though, to say the truth, her own offspring did not afford a favourable specimen of her practice. That circumstance, however, was easily and naturally explained by her one morning, when the boy was absent, "I have a hard task before me, my dear Sir," she said, speaking of this subject. "Poor Alfred has been so terribly neglected, and so sadly spoiled, that the efforts to restrain him and make him apply are almost too much for me. I long foresaw what would be the result, and foresaw it with fear and trembling, but the will of those who had the best right to speak was, of course, obeyed, and between contending duties I yielded to that which appeared paramount. I did not, indeed, think," she added in a low tone, "that I should be left alone to struggle with the faults encouraged by indulgence I could not counteract."

"Do you not think, my dear Madam," asked Mr. Charlton, "that the best plan would be to send him to school?"

Mrs. Latimer shook her head with a rueful smile. "I cannot

afford it," she said in a low tone, and then added, a moment or two after, as her words had thrown her worthy visitor into a train of thought, "No, I must be contented to do what I can myself, and for the rest must trust to masters, when I can hear of any good ones."

"There are some very fair masters in the neighbourhood," replied Mr. Charlton. "With the exception of music, which he does not want, you will find all that you require. The music-master, indeed, is a very indifferent teacher, and I have on more than one occasion thought of going back to London again, in order to give Louisa better instruction."

Mrs. Latimer turned a shade paler, but the next moment she exclaimed "Oh! Mr. Charlton, I have thought of something that will indeed be delightful. You must let me be your daughter's music-mistress. It will at once be a great pleasure to me, and it will afford me the only means I ever shall have of showing you how deeply grateful I am for all the kindness you have evinced towards me."

Mr. Charlton hesitated and was embarrassed, said he could not think of Mrs. Latimer taking such trouble, and made a number of other apologies; but the lady persisted in her plan, and, as she had no piano at her lodging, it was agreed that she should come up every fine morning to give Louisa Charlton some instruction. Louisa herself was delighted, and every day Mrs. Latimer became a greater favourite both with father and daughter. She was often a companion at their breakfast table; often stayed to dinner. Her son was frequently at Mallington House, and, though by no means much approved of by Mr. Charlton, was tolerated for Mrs. Latimer's sake. She was the greatest resource to that worthy gentleman that could be imagined — his companion, his friend; and he would have been very well inclined that matters should have gone on in the same way to the close of his days, but Mrs. Latimer did not intend that it should be so.

When she had been about nine months in the place Mr. Charlton observed, with real concern, that she grew graver and more thoughtful than ever; that she seldom smiled, and when she did so it was faintly, and not from the heart. He inquired of himself

what could be the matter for some time before he inquired of any one else. But, at length, one day, when he had, during a morning call upon her, remarked that she was more serious than ever, he asked her maid, who opened the door to give him exit — a calm, staid, shrewd-looking woman — if Mrs. Latimer were ill, observing that she looked out of spirits.

"Really, Sir, I do not know what is the matter," said the abigail. "I see clearly enough that my mistress is fretting about something, but I cannot tell you what it is. She has had sorrow enough, poor thing, for one so good and so beautiful."

"Pray were you with her when her husband died, Mrs. Windsor?" asked Mr. Charlton.

"Ay, that I was, Sir," answered the maid, "and a terrible day, too. He was a wild, rash, violent man, and treated her ill enough. But still he was her husband, Sir; and although as to loving him very much, that was not possible, yet the shock nearly killed her."

"Well, pray, Mrs. Windsor," rejoined Mr. Charlton, feeling that it would not be proper to push his inquiries any farther in that quarter, "if you find out that I can be of any service to Mrs. Latimer let me know. You may be perfectly sure I should be delighted to render it."

The maid promised to do so; but nothing resulted from this conversation for some time, and Mrs. Latimer still continued grave and sad. At times, indeed, when walking on the common with Mr. Charlton, or sitting with him alone, a burst of happier feeling would take place. She would give way to some playful sally; appeal to him upon some light matter of taste; discuss the subject with him eagerly; perhaps oppose his opinions at first, but, in the end, yielded invariably, and then would turn her fine blue eyes upon him, and exclaim "The women are not capable of arguing, my dear friend, and I believe we had better never attempt it." Then again, the moment after, she would fall into sad thought again, and at times her eyes would fill with tears.

At length one morning a note arrived from her, at the hour at which she usually appeared, excusing herself for not coming, as she had matters of business which would occupy her all day. A

second day she excused herself, a third she had a cold; and Mr. Charlton went down in person to inquire after her. At a little distance from her door he met her son Alfred, and stopping to shake hands with the boy, naturally expressed a hope that Mrs. Latimer was not seriously indisposed.

"Oh! mamma is well enough," replied Alfred Latimer. "She is only moping. She has been moping these three or four days; but you must not tell her I said so, for she forbade me."

Mr. Charlton went on and rang at her door, nor was he refused admittance. He found her seated reading, and thinking it better to begin upon the subject that he had at heart at once, he said "My dear lady, I have remarked that you have been much out of spirits of late. Now you must not think me intrusive; but, feeling the very sincere regard for you that I do, I may be permitted to say that, as you have no one here with whom to consult, if you require advice or assistance in any way, I should feel it a slight if you did not apply to me."

Mrs. Latimer coloured, and seemed a good deal agitated; but after a moment's pause, she pressed Mr. Charlton's hand in her own, saying emphatically, "Thank you! thank you! best and kindest of men. But, alas, I fear that you can give me no assistance, and that your advice in this instance would but confirm the resolution which I have already taken, with bitter regret. Oh! had I had your advice and support, long, long ago, how many sorrows might have been saved me!"

"Well, but take them now," said Mr. Charlton, "and first tell me, my dear Madam, what this determination is?"

"I will," replied Mrs. Latimer, "but first you must hear a word or two of preface. Married very young, partly at my father's persuasion, partly from the giddy thoughtlessness of youth, to a man, of whom I shall only say that even then I should not have chosen him, had I had opportunity of selection, or time for thought, I endeavoured to do my duty well — indeed I did, Mr. Charlton; nay, more, I tried to make my duty pleasure. The rest I must pass in silence — the memory of the dead is sacred; but, I have known little peace in life till I came down here. In this quiet place, and with your kind and beneficial society, I have

enjoyed my first happy moments since girlhood; but, alas! now I must leave it."

Mr. Charlton started, as if she had struck him, so completely was the possibility of such an event absent from his thoughts. "But why, Mrs. Latimer? Why?" he exclaimed.

"Because," she replied, "and you will own the reason to be a good one — my means are not equal to living even in the moderate way in which I live here. I have shaped my expenditure by my income; but a sudden claim upon a part of the small property my husband left having started up, even that poor income is diminished."

"Nay, but let me look into the claim on your behalf," said Mr. Charlton; "it may not be fair — it may not be just."

"Yes, it is," replied the lady, "I have been forced to become a better woman of business than you give me credit for being. I went into all the details at once about a month ago; I found that it was indubitable — though the lawyers said I might contest the validity of the documents — that the money had been received, and therefore I ordered it to be paid immediately. It is already done; my income is reduced by so much; and I have only to wait till I can receive a sufficient sum to pay a few little bills here, and then, I fear — I must — yes, indeed I must leave you," and Mrs. Latimer burst into tears.

Mr. Charlton soothed her kindly and tenderly, and when she was somewhat more composed he said, "Indeed, this shocks and grieves me deeply; and if you would but consider me really in the light which you have often said you do — namely, that of a friend, a sincere true friend — and make use of my purse as if it were your own, till this little storm be passed —"

"Mr. Charlton!" exclaimed Mrs. Latimer, drawing herself back, as if greatly surprised, "Impossible! But no," she added the next moment, "I know you meant it kindly, graciously, nobly — as you do everything. But that is quite impossible. A woman cannot receive money but from a father, or a husband — nay, say not a word more on that score, or I shall think you do not respect me. As to the money, I care not for it. There are countries where I can live at a cheaper rate than here, and I am ready, will-

ing, to live on bread-and-water — ay, to work for that bread, should need be; but to part with the only people who have been really kind to me — to quit the only spot where I have known tranquillity, is bitter indeed," and Mrs. Latimer wept again.

What Mr. Charlton might have replied at that moment, had he not been interrupted, who can tell? but just as he was about to answer, Alfred Latimer burst into the room, laughing at something he had seen or done in the village. The boy was surprised to see his mother in tears, and turned a look quickly, and almost fiercely, upon Mr. Charlton, as if he had been doing something to grieve her.

Mrs. Latimer, however, held out her fair hand to her friend, saying, "Forgive me for thus giving way, and say no more upon the subject at present. We will talk about it more hereafter, when I am calmer."

"Well, then, my dear lady," replied Mr. Charlton, "I shall take it for granted that you will not rashly act in this matter till we have spoken further."

"I will take your advice in all things," answered the lady; "where should I go for counsel if not to you, my best — I may, indeed, say my only friend?"

When Mr. Charlton returned to his own house he found his mind much more perturbed than was ordinary with him, or at all agreeable. That Mrs. Latimer might quit Mallington had never entered his imagination. She had never hinted such an intention; she had seemed so happy, so contented with the place, that he had taken it for granted everything would go on just as it had gone on for an indefinite time, and the idea of losing her society, and being again reduced to the state of listless apathy in which he had been when she arrived, seemed to him a second widowhood. Yet what could he do to prevent such a result? She had reasonable grounds for her resolution; she was evidently resolved to receive no pecuniary assistance; and, though he might think her a little too scrupulous with so sincere a friend as himself, he honoured her scruples too much to strive to shake them. The term second widowhood, which he had employed in his own thoughts, ran in his mind. He began to fancy that he should find his time still

burdensome to him through life, unless he married again; and the expression which Mrs. Latimer had herself used, saying that a woman could only receive money from a father or a husband, was one of the first things that made him ask himself, if he did marry, who could he so well and wisely wed as herself?"

At first he wished that he were ten years younger, their ages, then, he thought, might not have been so out of proportion. As it was, people would only say that he had been caught by the eye, and laugh at the old gentleman for marrying the fair young widow. Yet, after all, he recollected that he was not so very aged as grief and want of occupation, and the dark views they had engendered, made him fancy. He was barely fifty-four; Mrs. Latimer might be thirty-five, or thirty-six, for she had told him that she looked younger than she really was. There was a difference, certainly, of fifteen or sixteen years, but what of that? There was many a more disproportionate match every day; and, let the world say what it would, he was conscious that it was not for beauty, or any ephemeral advantage, that he chose her, but merely for the sake of an amiable and pleasant companion, who had soothed his melancholy, and whose high qualities he knew.

Thus Mr. Charlton went on, diminishing some objections in his own eyes, and boldly meeting others with a flat negative, till dinner time; and yet he was by no means satisfied, and still less decided. He thought of his former wife — of her he had loved with the fondest affection — who had been the sunshine of his home, the light of his steps, the pride, as well as the darling, of his heart; and when he looked into his own bosom he found nothing like the same feelings there towards Mrs. Latimer that he had experienced towards her. True, it was not to be expected — true, perhaps, it was better not. This ought to be a marriage of reason, whereas the other had been a marriage of love. But then, again, he thought of his daughter; and, why or wherefore he could not tell, his heart misgave him. It was but a prejudice, he fancied. On heard so much of step-mothers, and perhaps they might occasionally act ill, but there must be exceptions—indeed, he had known them himself, and Mrs. Latimer already showed for Louisa almost the affection of a mother.

Yet he was not satisfied; and at dinner he was thoughtful, absent, almost fretful. Towards nine in the evening, as he was trying to turn his mind to other thoughts, with the prudent resolution of sleeping over the matter, and just when Louisa had retired to bed, one of his old servants announced to him that Mrs. Windsor, Mrs. Latimer's maid, desired to see him.

"Show her in, show her in!" cried Mr. Charlton, in some agitation; and when the abigail appeared he exclaimed, "Good evening, Mrs. Windsor, I hope your lady is not ill!"

"No, Sir," replied the maid; and then waiting till the door was closed, she added, "but you told me, Sir, to inform you if I found out what made my mistress so grave and sad, and as I discovered to-night I thought I would come up and tell you, especially as you are somewhat concerned, Sir."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Charlton, in some surprise; "how is that, Mrs. Windsor?"

"Why, Sir," answered his companion, pausing and thinking for a moment, with a grave and embarrassed look, "it is an unpleasant thing to tell, but yet, as I was saying, I think it is but right that you should know, for I am sure you, who are quite the master of the place, as I may say, will soon put a stop to it."

"If it be anything unpleasant to your mistress, and I have power to do so," replied Mr. Charlton, "I certainly will; but what is it, Mrs. Windsor?"

"Why, Sir, it is just this," the maid proceeded, after another hesitating pause — "those two old cats at whose house we lodge, the Miss Martins, are the greatest gossips and scandal-makers in the world, and they can't even keep their tongues off Mrs. Latimer, who never had a word said against her in her life."

"Indeed!" cried Mr. Charlton, with a tremulous emotion of the lip, "and pray what can they find to say against her now?"

"Truly, they must needs talk about your coming so often to see her, Sir," rejoined Mrs. Windsor, as if with an effort, "and about her coming up here to Miss Charlton, Sir — that 's what they say; and I have found out that three or four days ago that old

tabby, the eldest one, had the face to go up to my lady and speak to her about it, and to say it was not respectable."

"She did, did she!" exclaimed Mr. Charlton, his cheek growing very hot, "well, my good lady, I will soon settle that business!"

"They are cunning old creatures," continued the maid, with a scornful smile, "for they never said a word till they thought Mrs. Latimer was going to leave them, and then they chose to begin. However, Sir, I thought it right to let you know, for I never like any one to be spoken ill of behind his back, and to have things put upon him that he never dreamt of — especially a gentleman so kind and good to every one as you are."

"You did very right, Mrs. Windsor," replied Mr. Charlton, "there 's a guinea for you. Do not say anything to Mrs. Latimer about your having seen me. I suppose she did not know you were coming here?"

"Oh! yes, Sir," said the maid, "she had told me to take a note to Miss Charlton, which I have given to your man; but she did not know that I was going to speak with you, and, for heaven's sake, don't tell her, Sir. She would be so angry."

"No, no, make yourself easy, Mrs. Windsor," replied Mr. Charlton, "I will not betray you; but I will find means to put a stop to their idle gossip, depend upon it, and now good night. I shall call down before luncheon to-morrow."

Thus they parted, and Mr. Charlton walked up and down the room for at least half an hour. A new and powerful motive was given to him for doing as he wished to do; nay, it was better than a motive — it was an excuse. Mrs. Latimer's reputation was affected by his friendship for her, there was no means of remedying that evil but one, and Mr. Charlton from that moment determined to put it in her power at least to do so. He was somewhat anxious and nervous upon the subject, indeed. She might take a different view of the matter — she might look upon the difference of age as an insurmountable bar. She might like him very well as a friend, but not think of him as a husband. Yet, when he had retired to rest, and thought over a thousand little traits which he had perceived, he began to hope that he was not altogether so indifferent

to her. That she had a great regard for him was evident; that to abandon his society was painful to her she had acknowledged; and he remembered more than once having caught her eyes fixed upon his face with an expression of interest. He was conscious that he was a good-looking man of his age, and now he began to wish that he had not continued to wear powder and a pigtail. That, however, could not now be helped, for he would not venture upon the ridicule of cutting off the latter incumbrance upon the eve of a declaration, and thinking that a sleepless night would not improve his personal appearance, he turned upon his side and courted the drowsy god. As usual, in such cases, the god was somewhat slow to come, and Mr. Charlton was up early the next morning refreshing himself with a walk in the garden. At breakfast his daughter sat opposite to him, and entertained him with her young conversation; but every time his eyes turned upon her his heart smote him. However his resolution was taken, and about eleven away he went to execute it.

He found the fair widow looking, he thought, more fascinating than ever, and, luckily for his purpose, alone. Her eyes beamed when she saw him; and she held out her soft delicate hand with a smile so enchanting that Mr. Charlton began to feel emotions of tenderness which carried him on wonderfully after a while, though they interrupted him a little at first.

"You seem busy, my dear Mrs. Latimer," he said, looking at her writing-desk, which was open before her, and at the table covered with papers. "I hope I do not disturb you; but even if I do I must still intrude a little, for I have one or two things to say."

"I was only putting my desk into order for a journey," said Mrs. Latimer, with the smile passing away, and giving place to a look of sadness; "for I see, my excellent friend, it must come to that."

"Nay, I think not," replied Mr. Charlton, seating himself beside her on the little hard-stuffed rosewood sofa of the lodging. "I think not," he repeated, "unless, indeed, you be very resolute to go. There is such a thing, my dear lady, as a choice of evils in this world, and I am going to put such an alternative before you. You have expressed great unwillingness to go from Mallington, and I believe you to be quite sincere, for where one is loved and

esteemed, there one generally finds some sort of pleasure. You have, also, been kind enough to say that the loss of my daughter's and my own society had no slight part in causing your unwillingness."

"A part, my kind friend, so great, that the alternative you propose would be a very painful one indeed if I did not choose it to avoid such grief. For yourself, I can only say that you have acted towards me a part that has ever made me look upon you as an elder brother."

"Well, my dear Madam," said Mr. Charlton, "I tell you the alternative is but one of two evils: it is for you to judge which is the greater. I wish you, then, to stay at Mallington — to change your present residence, and to come to mine."

Mrs. Latimer looked all amazement; but Mr. Charlton, proceeded with more calmness than he had himself expected — "This, my sweet friend, can but be done at the expense of a great sacrifice. To render it right — to render it possible, I may say — you must consent to give your hand to a man much older than yourself, and to make him happy at the expense, perhaps, of some regrets."

Mrs. Latimer pressed her hand upon her heart as if its beating were too much for her; and then, bending down her head, she hid her eyes in her handkerchief and wept.

"Nay, nay," said Mr. Charlton, taking her hand somewhat alarmed, "I did not intend to grieve you."

"Grieve me! grieve me!" cried Mrs. Latimer, raising her beautiful eyes swimming with tears, but with a smile upon her lips. "Oh! my noble and generous friend, you know not what I feel;" and she placed her other hand in his also. "But I cannot suffer you," she said, after a start. "No! I cannot suffer you to make such a sacrifice yourself. You know that I am poor; but you do not know how poor, my good friend. Debts I have none, but at this moment I have less than one hundred per annum. You can, you ought to look for a wife far better endowed than I am. Still in the prime of life, with large fortune, and everything to make a woman happy, you have every right to expect —"

"Hush, hush, hush!" said Mr. Charlton, interrupting her, "I will not hear another word upon such subjects. If you can feel

that you will be happy with me, if you will be a mother to my daughter and a companion to myself, the journey from Mallington is at an end."

"For ever!" said Mrs. Latimer, leaning her head upon his shoulder, "Oh!" she murmured in a soft tone, "Oh! that I had known you earlier in life, as I said the other day, what misery it would have saved me. But how rarely is it that one meets in early years the only person who can make one happy."

We have, however, intruded somewhat too far upon scenes that are generally private, and we must therefore leave Mrs. Latimer and Mr. Charlton alone to settle all about the marriage without our presence. We have not been the only ones, however, dear readers, who overheard that tender conversation. Ah no! Miss Mathilda Martin, having first ascertained that Mrs. Windsor had gone out as soon as she had let Mr. Charlton in, was upon the stairs close to the door — so close, indeed, that sometimes her ear, sometimes her eye very nearly touched the keyhole. Fie, Miss Mathilda; surely you are not listening! So it was however that after a certain time Miss Mathilda descended to the shop, with a cheek highly coloured, and an eye full of excitement. "Oh! yes indeed," she said to her sister, "it is just so! quite as we thought. Don't say a word, Winifred. I heard it with my own ears. He is now going to forget all decency and to keep her up at his own house. I heard him I can assure you. He said these very words "I wish you to stay at Mallington — to change your present residence, and to come to mine."

The reader will perceive that Miss Mathilda, as many other persons do, had listened no longer, and for no better object, than to confirm her preconceived opinions.

"And what did she say?" cried Miss Martin, eagerly. "Will she go?"

"Oh, to be sure!" replied Mathilda, "no doubt of it. There were plenty of 'dear friends' and 'sweet friends' going, I can assure you. Ah! the nasty old man, how I hate him."

"She 's the worst of the two," answered her sister; "a trumpery minx, with her high airs. Why, she has never once asked us to take a cup of tea; as if we were dirt. I should not wonder

if she were no widow at all, but just some cast off, with her boy."

Mrs. Latimer was evidently lost in the opinion of the two Misses Martin; and after having thus discussed the mistress they proceeded to assail the maid. Of her they said what was true enough, that she was an artful jade; for though they had not exactly hit upon Mrs. Latimer's real faults, she being, perhaps, the last person on earth to be misled by any man, young or old, yet their closer observation of good Mrs. Windsor had given them a good insight into her character. As they were in progress, however, they were suddenly interrupted by the entrance of good Dr. Western, the rector, who, after ordering a few articles of clothing for some of his poor, went on to ask if Mrs. Latimer was at home.

"Oh, dear, yes, Sir," said Miss Martin, "she has got Mr. Charlton with her, as usual, Sir."

"She is soon going to quit, however," added Mathilda, "and I cannot say I am sorry."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the clergyman, with considerable surprise, "may I ask why? Mrs. Latimer is a very respectable person, though not rich, and I trust that you have too much good sense and good feeling, Miss Martin, to value any one merely as they may be wealthy."

"Ay, but is she so respectable, doctor?" asked Miss Martin, with a significant look.

"I have the best assurance that she is so," replied Dr. Western. "I will add something more, my good lady. Knowing the propensity of all small places to deal uncharitably with the characters of strangers, and having last week heard something that did not please me of reports set about respecting this lady, I took the trouble of writing for information, and find, as I supposed, that those reports are without foundation, and that she is in every respect what she seems; in a word, one who has acted through life with perfect propriety, even though placed in very painful and difficult situations. I trust, therefore, that we shall hear no more of this, for it is neither Christian nor generous."

Dr. Western, who had purposely given the Misses Martin an opportunity of drawing this reproof upon their own heads, then

proceeded to pay his intended visit to Mrs. Latimer; and it was remarked by the ladies of the shop that he and Mr. Charlton walked out, and proceeded down the street together.

A vague rumour, in the course of the subsequent week, spread through the village that Mrs. Latimer was not long to be Mrs. Latimer. Louisa Charlton, or Mr. Charlton, were always with her; the carriages of neighbouring gentry were frequently at her door; sempstresses and dress-makers were busily employed; and the Misses Martin, beginning to find that they had made a very great mistake, were her most humble servants, fawning egregiously on even Mrs. Windsor, and declaring that "Dear Mrs. Latimer was certainly one of the sweetest creatures that ever was seen."

Dear Mrs. Latimer, however, did not forget them; she was perfectly civil, indeed; but she bided her time.

At length, one Saturday night an elderly gentleman, who was reported to be an army agent, came down to Mallington, spent the evening with Mrs. Latimer and Mr. Charlton, and took a bed at the house of the latter. The next day the lady appeared at church divested of her weeds; and on the Tuesday following, at an early hour, the widower and the widow stood together before the altar, to be made man and wife. The army agent, who had been a friend of her former husband, acted as father upon the present occasion; a small party of the country neighbours were witnesses to the ceremony. Louisa Charlton and Alfred Latimer were invited to spend a few days with a friend who lived about seven miles from Mallington, and Mr. Charlton and his fair bride set out upon a tour into Warwickshire.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS was a great discoverer, as the reader is undoubtedly aware; but he never made half the discoveries that Mr. Charlton did within one year from the time that Mrs. Latimer gave him her hand at the altar. Not that she behaved ill to him; for, on the contrary, she redoubled her affectionate manner; exerted herself to be more enchanting than ever; soothed,

flattered, fondled him. But Mr. Charlton had now nearer means of observation, and he was naturally a clear-sighted man. He was as fond of her as ever — he would not have lost her society for the world; but he was neither old enough nor young enough to be blind to all the little traits of character which presented themselves in his fair wife; and all these traits tended to show that Mrs. Charlton was one of those ladies who never act without an object. She calculated her game with the most precise and definite computation, and worked boldly towards the result which she wished to arrive at by the means she thought most likely to attain it. From her earliest years she had been taught to consider her own interests in the first place, and had willingly seconded her father in ensnaring the son of a noble family into a connexion which all his friends disapproved. His first object was to seduce her, but though not without strong passions, they were not of that character which were likely to make her fall a sacrifice to the designs of any man. She could hate heartily, but love was not one of her weaknesses; and thus she skilfully led him on to make her his wife as the only means of possessing her. His fortune, never very great, she aided to impair, for she had tastes and habits as expensive as his own; and as he was of a violent and irritable disposition, and she had no object in soothing him, the coldness with which she listened to the details of his difficulties, and the little care she displayed in extricating him from them, often drove him into fits of passion, which produced scenes that caused all but very close observers to pity the sweet creature his wife very much. She had an admirable art too, of always putting him in the wrong, and as she was certainly ill-treated; for he was known more than once to strike her — and as she resisted, without any effort, many an attempt to seduce her from the right path made by that husband's dissolute associates, the world in general gave her credit for forbearance only equal to her virtue. Thus had passed her younger days, till at length, in a fit of rage and despair, Captain Latimer lost the use of his reason, and raised his hand against his own life.

Mrs. Latimer had then, as we have seen, set up the interesting young widow, and had visited various parts of England in that

capacity before she touched upon Mallington. At the latter place, she only proposed at first to look about her for a month; and finding there a clergyman apparently well to do, and a single man, her first thought was that perhaps, in course of time, she might become Mrs. Western. Perceiving very soon, however, that Dr. Western was not very accessible, and learning that the large house at the top of the hill belonged to a widower of great wealth, she determined to change her plan, in as much as a campaign against the heart of Mr. Charlton seemed open to more easy tactics, and because the object to be gained was greater. Affluence and ease, carriages, horses, servants, were things that Mrs. Latimer liked very much, and it was well worth a little study and art to obtain such advantages. The disposition of Mr. Charlton was easily read — Mrs. Latimer shaped her conduct accordingly; her maid, Mrs. Windsor, without any full explanation being necessary between mistress and servant, seconded her skilfully, and the result has been already seen by the reader.

It is an invariable rule, however, which often tends to bring down retribution on the head of deceivers, that we undervalue the good sense of people whom we have once taken in. Never cheat any one, dear reader; for depend upon it you will think him a fool ever after, till perchance he cheats you in return. Now, Mrs. Latimer, or, as we must henceforth call her, Mrs. Charlton, did undervalue the good sense of her second husband. She only recollected the result, that she had deceived him into thinking her all he wished, and she forgot the art she had displayed in making him think so. She forgot, also, that she was now placed before his eyes in the microscope of matrimony, and she did not exactly guard all her sayings and doings with that scrupulous care which would have been necessary to keep up the illusion. One great object was gained — she was his wife — and she thought she might have a little repose. She had another great object, it is true: to induce him to leave her at his death a large share of his fortune; but she trusted to habit and natural tenderness, and her own skill in pleasing, to obtain that very satisfactory result. Mr. Charlton had, indeed, settled upon her, previous to their marriage, an annual sum sufficient for her maintenance as his widow, in case of

his decease, but Mrs. Latimer had, on various accounts, not exacted as large a jointure as, perhaps, she might have obtained had she, to use an angler's term, "played her fish" after she had hooked him. But two causes prevented her doing so: in the first place, the character she had assumed, and which it was necessary to keep up, was repugnant to such a course; and in the next, she was naturally of an impatient disposition, and eager to enjoy the fair prospect before her. Thus, though she delicately hinted to her friend the army agent that some settlement might be necessary, yet she left the matter entirely in his hands; and he, for his part, thought the proposal of Mr. Charlton on that score very liberal.

After a bridal tour of somewhat more than a month Mr. and Mrs. Charlton returned to Mallington House; and the lady's taste for expense and display began to show itself. Her husband, however, did not object; he could well afford it, and, indeed, had somewhat reproached himself in days gone by with living too far within his income, solely from not knowing how to spend it reasonably. His former wife had no such habits, indeed, and the contrast struck him not altogether pleasantly; but he said nothing, and only insured that his expenses should be kept within due bounds. Then Mrs. Charlton thought it right to see the trade of the village improved by the establishment of a rival shop, in opposition to the Misses Martin. Encouragement was given to a speculative tradesman of the neighbouring town to break in upon the monopoly so long enjoyed by those ladies, and as he had all Mrs. Charlton's custom, and her strongest recommendation, besides smart new articles, which had never been seen in Mallington before, the old shop was soon neglected, the dull-coloured prints and muslins hung unpurchased in the windows, and the Misses Martin, growing every day sourer and more sour, rued the hour when they had put up the bill of lodgings which had caught the widow's eye, and mentally gave her over to ruin and condemnation.

Neither of this did Mr. Charlton wholly approve, but his fair wife took care to conceal the animus of this proceeding from his eyes, and he was, therefore, obliged to content himself with her notions of free trade and anti-monopoly. One thing, however, did annoy him: he had forgotten that, in marrying the widow, he

ran a great risk of marrying her son too, and Alfred Latimer soon gave him cause to repent of having done so. He proved a wild, capricious, rash, unfeeling boy, and it became evident very speedily, that his spoiling had not been entirely on his father's part. He was very ignorant, very arrogant; and, with none of those principles which, implanted in very early youth', prove sooner or later the correctors of follies and the tamers of passions, he seemed to have no idea but of indulgence and amusement.

After having given way for about six months, Mr. Charlton, moved by a sense of duty to the boy himself, shook off his desire of ease and tranquillity, and represented to his wife the absolute necessity of sending him to school. He proposed Eton, and offered to provide liberally for his expenses there, saying that of course he looked upon her son nearly in the light of his own. But Mrs. Charlton was in despair at the idea; she showed in feeling terms that he had been so long brought up at home that the change to a public school would be more severe and trying to him than to other lads; and all that her husband could obtain by his most reasonable arguments was, that he should be sent to a private school some fifteen miles off, where she might be at hand herself to watch over him.

Not long after this Mrs. Charlton hinted to her husband that it might be better if their dear Louisa were sent to a finishing school in London. She suggested that it would give a polish to her manners, a tone, a style to her appearance and demeanour that never could be acquired in country society; that all the accomplishments which she possessed wanted the perfecting touch of the first masters, and that it was good for all young people to see a little of the world before they had to play an active part in it.

Mr. Charlton heard her to an end with perfect composure, but then replied gravely, but not unkindly, "No, my dear. She never sets her foot in a school."

He said no more at first, and Mrs. Charlton was inclined to argue the point; but he stopped her abruptly, adding, "Her mother never was at a school; she had a great abhorrence of them. I promised her that Louisa never should be sent to one, and that promise I will keep."

Mrs. Charlton burst into tears, and Mr. Charlton quitted the room.

She found that she had injured herself, however; and hastened to retrieve her false move by renewed kindness to her step-daughter, towards whom, to say sooth, she had somewhat cooled since her marriage; but she did not love Louisa the more for being the subject of her first dispute with her husband. In manner she was sweet and gentle to Louisa Charlton, always calling her either My love, or My dear Louisa; but there were many small traits which showed to Louisa herself, and, what was of still greater importance, to Mr. Charlton also, that there was little sincere affection. Often in a kindly tone, and with numerous professions of regard and assurances that she did it for the child's own good, she would reprove Louisa for one little act or another, and lecture her upon her conduct and demeanour. She affected to think that it was her duty to do so, and therefore did it before her husband; but Mr. Charlton was very keen-sighted in regard to his child, and the first question which he asked himself was, whether the censure was just, before he inquired whether his new wife was only actuated by a sense of duty or by some other motive. He generally found reason to think, however, that Louisa was in the right; for though she made no defence, and bore all meekly, yet she had an advocate in her father's heart, and a judge in his sense of justice which did her right, contrary to Mrs. Charlton's expectations. That lady, indeed, only strove to produce an unfavourable impression on her husband of his daughter's conduct and character; but she was not at all aware that Mr. Charlton was silently, and in his own mind, trying them both, and generally giving judgment against her. She did not at all understand at first, and, indeed, never fully understood, the exact nature of his love of quiet and his abhorrence of discussions. She often thought that she had gained her point, and produced the result she intended, because he said nothing. She fancied he did not see and comprehend, because he did not oppose or reprove; but, in truth, Mr. Charlton was always analyzing and forming his estimate by the accumulation of facts which he observed. Thus, on one or two occasions when his quietness had induced Mrs. Charlton to go on to a point where he felt it his duty

to oppose decidedly what he thought wrong, and some little dispute took place in consequence, Mrs. Charlton believed that it would all be soon forgotten; but she deceived herself. It was a new page written in her history — a fresh line in the portrait which her husband was constantly drawing in his own mind.

These occurrences were more frequent when her son was at home during the holidays than at other times; for his wild rash spirit, his obstinacy and selfishness, were constant sources of annoyance to Mr. Charlton, and were as constantly defended, palliated, or concealed by the mother. Sometimes, too, in spite of all her skill and self-command, the strong and violent passions which were in her bosom would burst forth with a vindictive fire, which startled and alarmed her husband. Thus, one day, about a year after their marriage, the boy was brought in by the head gardener (who had often complained of the destruction he committed in the garden) for a more unpardonable offence. The man appeared in the hall, where the young gentleman's mother was then standing, holding him firmly by the collar, notwithstanding his kicking, struggling, and biting; and he at once informed the lady that Master Alfred had that moment destroyed the whole melon beds, and broken the glasses of the frames, in revenge for having been prevented from knocking off the blossoms of a fruit tree with a switch. The man spoke calmly and respectfully; but the boy, furious with passion, accused him of striking and maltreating him, and soon made his mother a participator in his anger. The idea of her son dragged in by the collar by a simple gardener was enough to excite her indignation; and ordering the man to quit his hold immediately, without making any answer to his complaint, she took her son by the hand, and, with raised colour and flashing eyes, sought Mr. Charlton in the library. Trying to subdue her voice to some degree of calmness, she demanded that Blackmore, the gardener, should be immediately dismissed, for daring to strike poor Alfred, for some of his little follies in the garden; and she proceeded to make out as aggravated a case against the man as possible.

Mr. Charlton heard her calmly, but with his eye resting more firmly on her flushed cheek than was pleasant to her, and then

called the boy to him, saying, "Come hither, Alfred, and tell me how all this has happened. But, before you speak, remember I must have the exact truth, which, I am sorry to say, you do not always give. Now, what occurred between you and Blackmore?"

The boy went on, detailed the circumstances according to his own version, admitted with apparent frankness that he had been switching the blossoms on the wall, but declared that the man had taken the stick from him, and struck him with it, and that it was in running away from him that he had jumped upon the melon beds and broken the frames. The story was not well arranged, for a very short investigation would have shown that three frames had been destroyed, with all the wanton fury of passion; but Mr. Charlton made no investigation, and remained silent for a minute after the boy's tale, broken by tears of rage, had come to an end.

"Well, my dear," cried Mrs. Charlton, impatiently, "have I not a right to demand that he be discharged immediately?"

"No, Emily;" replied Mr. Charlton; "he cannot be discharged."

"And pray why not, Mr. Charlton?" asked his wife.

"Because, my dear," was the answer, "Alfred has told a most gross and shameful falsehood. I was standing at that window at the time, and saw the whole affair. If you will follow my advice, you will send Alfred back to school this very day, as a punishment for the lie he has told, and the bad spirit he has displayed. As to discharging Blackmore, for simply doing his duty, that is out of the question."

Mrs. Charlton made no answer, but it was a terrible struggle between prudence and passion. She burst into tears, however, and, taking her son by the hand, quitted the room. There was another line drawn in her picture; and a darker one still was to come. Blackmore remained for about two months more in the service of his old master, and then gave warning. Mr. Charlton asked no explanation, and the man offered none; but the former was well aware that the place had been made too uncomfortable for the man to remain in it.

Although Louisa Charlton had not sufficient knowledge of the human heart to analyze and examine as her father did, yet she *felt*

the character of her step-mother, if I may use the term. She knew that she was not loved by her, and that her tenderest tones and sweetest terms were not real. She avoided her as much as possible, then, and Mrs. Charlton was very glad of it; for she was somewhat too apparently anxious to be free from Louisa's society. If she were going out to drive or to walk she always contrived to believe that "the dear child" was busy about something — that she had this to study or that to do. But Mr. Charlton, in his quiet way, soon put a moral restraint upon her in these respects. When such excuses for not taking his daughter were made, he remained at home, saying he would wait till she had done and then walk with her. This was a course which his fair wife did not at all approve of, as by that means the daughter became her husband's companion, not herself; and when she found that it was systematically pursued she altered her conduct, not without some apprehension of having made another false move.

Louisa was always gentle, and kind and affectionate, and treated her father's wife with perfect respect; but even that Mrs. Charlton did not like, for she would fain have discovered something substantial to find fault with. As the sweet girl grew up, however, and displayed promises of great beauty, Mrs. Charlton thought of a change of plans; and in her own mind laid out a scheme for uniting Louisa to her son — thus securing possession of the whole of Mr. Charlton's wealth. The great obstacle, indeed, was the boy's own disposition, of which she well knew neither father nor daughter approved; and from that moment she strove eagerly with the lad — not to make him amend, but rather conceal his faults. Advice, exhortations, reproaches, were all employed in vain, and her own indulgence tended to frustrate her object. Each day as he advanced in life Alfred Latimer showed himself more headstrong and wild, and a taste for low society began to display itself when at home; for the quiet cheerfulness of Mr. Charlton, and even the gayer gentleness of Louisa, were not at all to his taste. Towards the latter, indeed, he showed some affection of a particular kind; but even after they had become the young man and the young woman it never assumed the character of love. It was, in a degree that of a brother for a sister, by

which name, indeed, he always called her, in spite of all Mrs. Charlton could say; but it was less strong, less elevated. At times he would be angry and sullen with her for days together; at others would forget her entirely in his own pursuits; at others would tease and give her pain. But whenever he was in trouble or distress, he would fly to her, even in preference to his mother; and often, by her advice, assistance, or intercession, she would extricate him from the difficulties that his own faults and follies had brought upon him. Louisa, who was gentle and kind to all, was so to Alfred Latimer especially; but it was only because he was the son of her father's wife. She approved neither his character nor his conduct; she disliked his society; she shrank from his conversation, except when he sought her for counsel or aid; and the more she saw of him, the more unworthy she thought him, till she learned at length to regard him with something like fear, though it was more fear for himself, and for the follies and evils he might commit, than for the annoyance he might bring upon her.

I have said above that Mrs. Charlton was not pleased at his giving Louisa the name of sister; and the reason was, that she wished to bring Mr. Charlton and Louisa herself to look upon him in a very different light. She strove for this object gradually, however, shutting her eyes to all the many motives which could make her husband reject such a son-in-law. She endeavoured to persuade him that all Alfred's faults would pass away in time, that they were but errors of youth and over-indulgence; that the world and the weight of high duties, would keep down the too high spirits and warm passions; and she attempted to rouse pride in favour of the alliance she had in view, by casually speaking at different times of the probability — which she represented as great — of her son succeeding to the title and estates of his cousin, whom she declared to be a sickly and feeble youth, not likely to see maturity.

Mr. Charlton had by this time gained deep insights, and he heard her without any marked reply, waiting to discover her object; for he now knew that she always had one. At length one evening when Louisa had gone to bed, and she and her husband

were sitting alone, Mrs. Charlton, as he seemed in a cheerful and yielding humour, ventured to say, "I know not what you feel, my dear; but if I could see my poor boy united to a woman who would guide him aright; and, by occupying all his affections, give him those high objects which I am sure are all that is wanting to correct his errors, I should think the great end of life attained."

"I fear such a one would be difficult to find, Emily," replied Mr. Charlton; "and for her sake, poor thing, if ever he is destined to meet with such a one, it would be better to let his passions be broken by the hard struggle of the world, or tamed by their own excess."

"Such a one is our dear Louisa," said Mrs. Charlton, in a hesitating tone.

"She is certainly one to make any man happy," replied her father, gravely, "but she is out of the question, and her like is not easily found."

"But why is she out of the question?" asked Mrs. Charlton, a little irritated. "Suppose they loved each other."

"That cannot be supposed," said Mr. Charlton. "They are brother and sister, indeed, and may love each other as such, but my curse would follow any other tie between them."

He spoke in a tone that the lady had never heard him use before, and, as he did so, he rose as if to put an end to the conversation.

The next morning her husband was up somewhat earlier than usual, and went down into the village before breakfast. He had not been long gone, however, before one of the lawyer's clerks came up to ask for a memorandum book which Mr. Charlton had left in his library. The servant could not find it, and applied to his mistress, who was now making breakfast. At first she told Louisa to go and look, but the moment after a sudden thought seemed to strike her, and she exclaimed "No; I know where it is. I will go."

She did, and found the book; but before she gave it to the man, who was waiting, she unclasped it, and looked at the first

page as if to see that it was the right one. Her eye instantly lighted upon the words "Mem. for will: — If, contrary to my express commands, Louisa should by any chance marry A. L., everything to go to next heir."

Mrs. Charlton restrained herself with pain while she handed the book to the man; but the moment he was gone she gave way to a burst of indescribable rage. Her pretty features became animated with the expression of a demon, and in her wrath she threw off the table and broke to pieces an inkstand which she knew her husband valued greatly. It had belonged to his first wife. When she returned to the breakfast room she was still under the influence of the same feelings; she scolded the servants, she spoke angrily to Louisa, she fell into fits of sombre thought; but the moment Mr. Charlton's step sounded in the hall she was changed as if by enchantment. Her sweet smile came back like sunshine returning to a stormy sky, and she was all grace and gentleness when he seated himself at the breakfast table.

She saw that her object was hopeless from that moment, however; and all that remained was to secure herself as large a share of Mr. Charlton's property as possible. For that purpose she redoubled all her efforts, and the next three or four years passed in very skilful, but very ineffectual manœuvres. Mr. Charlton's eyes were open; and he was not to be deceived any more. He well knew that to secure peace and tranquillity, and to induce his wife to behave with tenderness to his child, it was necessary to appear blind to everything, but any unkindness towards her; and he did appear so. Mrs. Charlton soon found that to show unkindness, or even coldness to Louisa, was to injure herself, and, therefore, before her husband she was as gentle as a lamb, though often at other moments she ventured upon an insinuation, or a taunt, which wounded deeply a heart very susceptible of, and accustomed to, kindness. Louisa complained not, however, for she knew that to do so would be to embitter the life of her father; but neither in this was Mr. Charlton blinded; for he often remarked, when he joined his wife and daughter, that the latter was very grave, and he attributed a mood not natural to her to its right cause.

To escape from conversation that was painful to her, and from thoughts that were painful also, Louisa Charlton often would walk down to the rectory, where good Dr. Western, and a widowed sister, of nearly his own age, who now lived with him, offered her society, if not cheerful, serene, and if not amusing, instructive. She joined in all their works of charity towards the poor of the neighbourhood, and contributed with a liberal hand to relieve many a case of urgent and unmerited distress; for she was nearly eighteen years of age, and her father took care that an allowance proportioned to the fortune she was to inherit should be placed at her own disposal. Mrs. Charlton was always glad to see her go; and generally, when a reason was thus afforded for not taking her with them, hurried Mr. Charlton to distant visits, or to parties of pleasure which did not always agree very well with his somewhat failing health. He was now above sixty years of age, and his original strong constitution and regular habits might have seemed to promise a green old age; but there was something preyed upon him. Perhaps, it was regret, not unmingled with self-reproach; and if so, it was natural that the restraint he put upon his own feelings to prevent their ever appearing in the eyes of either his wife or daughter, should aggravate the sufferings inflicted by a consciousness of having acted weakly.

Alfred Latimer was now frequently absent; for Mrs. Charlton had found it necessary, for the success of her own plans, to prevent the follies and vices, which were becoming more conspicuous as he grew towards manhood, from being obtruded upon the eyes of her husband; and he had been placed under the care of a clergyman at some distance, to prepare him for college. But his stay there did not tend in any great degree to improve his disposition, for the tutor was an indolent man, with whom he might study if he pleased, or remain idle if he liked; and, as the reader may well suppose, he showed strongly his affection for "the mother of vice."

Louisa had commenced her nineteenth year, and her birthday had been celebrated with affectionate joy by Mr. Charlton, when the morning after, as he was rising from his chair, he fell back insensible. The surgeon, Mr. Nethersole was sent for in haste,

and by copious bleeding relieved him for the time; but he remained ill for some months, and never fully recovered his health. Alfred Latimer was at Mallington at the time, and remained there while his step-father was obliged to keep his room, wandering about the country, no one knew whither, coming home late at night; and making constant demands upon his mother's purse. One day, however, Edmonds, the park-keeper of Lord Mallington, appeared at Mallington House, and demanded to speak with Mrs. Charlton. He was shown into her presence, and, in his usual bluff and straightforward manner, proceeded to inform her that her son had been seen on the preceding night in the preserves of the earl.

"He had two other young fellows with him, Madam," he continued, "and I dare say the young gentleman only did it for a spree; but there were guns fired and pheasants killed that is certain. Now I thought it best to come and tell you, Madam; for these fellows he was with are not fit company for him, and will get him into mischief; and as he has been always very civil to our people when he has called in at the cottage, I thought it a pity to see him go on so."

Mrs. Charlton was really shocked and alarmed, for she had previously entertained no idea of the length to which her son's taste for low society had been carried. She thanked the man sincerely, then, for his warning, and in order to break through such dangerous connexions, as well as to remove him before Mr. Charlton was well enough to come down and resume his usual habits, she acted with more firmness than usual where Alfred was concerned, and sent him back to his tutor's with the most serious admonition she had ever bestowed upon him in her life. He might perhaps have resisted, for he seldom showed any great reverence for his mother's authority, but the fact of having been discovered by the gamekeepers frightened him, and he obeyed.

At the end of about a month after his departure, Mr. Charlton had sufficiently recovered to go out and walk about the village and the neighbourhood, as he had been accustomed to do, and his daughter Louisa was now his constant companion; for Mrs. Charlton, who had got into habits of great self-indulgence, had, by this time, grown marvellously stout and heavy, and loved the

exercise in her carriage better than on foot. His conversation was now generally serious, and sometimes sad; and he often referred to the probability of his death taking place at no very distant period.

"I speak thus," my dear Louisa, he said one day, "because I would have you prepare your mind for such an event, as mine is prepared. I know how terribly the loss of one we love comes upon those who have never looked forward to it; and after such a fit of apoplexy as I have had, one always lives with a drawn sword hung over one, which may fall at any moment."

Louisa wiped some drops from her eyes, but only replied, "There is one favour I have to ask, my dear father, which is this: whenever you are ill again, do not let me be kept out of your room. You know that I will be quiet and not disturb you, and the anxiety and pain of being absent from you, and not knowing really and truly how you are is too terrible," and poor Louisa wept.

"Were you kept out when I was ill lately?" asked Mr. Charlton gravely.

"Yes, my dear father," replied Louisa, "several times. I was told, when I came, that you did not wish to be disturbed, that you would rather not see me then — as if I would have disturbed you, when I would sit by your bedside for hours, without noise or movement, if they would let me; I can bear anything but to be kept from you."

"You shall not, my sweet child!" said Mr. Charlton. "I thought there was something of the kind, from not seeing you so often as I wished for. But I understand it all, and it shall not occur again."

Whether the attempt might or not have been made to exclude the child once more from the bedside of her sick father I cannot say, for it was never put to the proof. Mr. Charlton went on apparently regaining health and strength for some months. The winter and the spring passed away without any event; Mrs. Charlton was all kindness and tenderness to her husband, and Louisa was giving way to the full hope of seeing his dark presentiments remain long unrealised. About the month of June news reached the village that the Earl of Mallington had been taken very ill in

London, and three days after came the intelligence that he was dead; but what horrified the attorney in the first instance, and also puzzled both the servants on the estate and the gossips of the place was, that he had died without a will, so that all his estates would go to the next male heir. Who was the next male heir then became the question; but the only house in Mallington which possessed a peerage was Mr. Charlton's. The solicitor begged leave to borrow it for a day, even Dr. Western looked into it, and Mr. Charlton himself examined it, with some curiosity, to know who was to be their new neighbour. It afforded little satisfaction, however, for it there appeared that the late lord had no brothers or uncles living; and in tracing back the ancestry, the lawyer declared that the nearest male heir was the Rev. Mr. Wilmot, a gentleman born about sixty years before, who was particularly marked as having no issue. "And yet," he added, "it would bear a question between him and the heirs of his uncle, Thomas Wilmot, of the Grange, if he had any."

He seemed to derive satisfaction from this view of the case, but more especially from the probability of there being great difficulty in settling the claims to the personal property, as the late lord had made no will.

Whether Mr. Charlton had, or had not made a will, or whether he intended to alter one he had made, or to make a new one, this fact seemed to occupy much of his thoughts; and during three days he visited the solicitor's office every morning. It was remarked that he grew more grave about this time; and, as if to dissipate unpleasant imaginations, he made several little excursions, sometimes for a day, sometimes for two or three. Thus passed June, July, and part of August; but towards the close of the latter month Mrs. Charlton ventured to have a few friends to dinner. The ladies had not long left the table, when a loud ringing of the dining-room bell startled the servants in the hall. When the butler ran in, and the footman followed, they found one gentleman supporting Mr. Charlton in his chair, while Dr. Western untied his neck-cloth. Mr. Nethersole was instantly sent for, and came with all despatch; but Mr. Charlton was quite insensible, and when the surgeon attempted to open a vein, no blood followed the lancet.

He was a bold and skilful man, however, and he instantly cut the artery of the temple. Some relief appeared to be afforded, and the sick man was removed to bed. The visitors, with the exception of Dr. Western, withdrew, and he waited for the office which he saw he might soon be called upon to perform: to console a daughter for the loss of her father. The moment was nearer than he thought, for in about an hour after Mr. Charlton had been removed to his own chamber, Mr. Nethersole came forth, leading Louisa in tears to the drawing-room. Dr. Western questioned him with his eyes; the surgeon gravely nodded his head, and returned to Mrs. Charlton, who had remained in the chamber of death.

The solemn quiet of a great change fell upon the whole house. About eleven Dr. Western took leave of his fair young companion, and she retired to weep in her own chamber. Mrs. Charlton had already disappeared, and the servants, with the exception of one watcher, soon after went to bed. All was still — all was dark — but about three o'clock a faint light was seen in the library by the man who drove the mail cart from the neighbouring town.

All the usual proceedings on such an occurrence were gone through with due solemnity, and the lawyer having given notice to Mrs. Charlton, on the day subsequent to Mr. Charlton's death, that he possessed a signed and attested copy of her late husband's will, by which Dr. Western was appointed one of the executors, that lady instantly sent to the worthy clergyman, begging that he would take the whole arrangements on himself, as she was totally unfit for the task. She requested him also to take possession of her husband's keys, and especially those of the library, in which he kept all his principal papers. Dr. Western did as she desired, and, in due time, the will in the hands of the attorney was opened, by which it was found that Mr. Charlton had raised the income previously secured to Mrs. Charlton, to one thousand per annum; and then, alter a few legacies to his old servants, and marks of kindness to his friends, had left the whole of his property with the reversion of the principal sum from which his widow received her annuity to his daughter, making it an absolute condition, however, that she should not marry Alfred Latimer.

Mrs. Charlton declared herself perfectly satisfied, and having

left the room with her step-daughter, the two executors, of whom the late partner of Mr. Charlton was one, together with the attorney and one of his clerks, proceeded to examine the papers of the deceased. In the strong box amongst the first things that they found was the duplicate of the will, but what was their surprise when, on opening it, a paper headed, "codicil," dropped out. By it Mr. Charlton confirmed his former will, but, premising that heiresses of considerable property were too often the dupes of sharpers, he went on to make it a condition that his daughter should obtain the consent of Mrs. Charlton to her marriage whenever that event took place; and that if she proceeded to contract matrimony without the said consent, he revoked all bequests in her favour, and transferred the whole of his estate to his widow. The codicil was not witnessed, but it was dated and signed; and the lawyer, after examining if attentively, and comparing it with some memorandum books in Mr. Charlton's own handwriting pronounced it good in law.

Here ends that introductory history which it was necessary to relate for the better understanding of what is to follow; and henceforth I shall content myself with the depiction of scenes rather than pursue a continuous narrative.

CHAPTER V.

A YEAR passed, or very nearly a year, when on one bright summer evening, about seven o'clock, the coach — the only coach that passed through Mallington — appeared, as usual, at the top of the hill. There seemed no particular load upon the vehicle: two countrymen going from some village not far off, being the only tenants of the roof; the inside being vacant, and one gentleman seated by the coachman on the box. The luggage was as scanty as the passengers were few, and the tarpauling stretched over one or two scattered trunks and hampers looked like the skin of an Alderney cow, so picturesquely irregular was the substratum it covered. The coachman, as may be easily conceived, was not very well pleased with his cargo, and looked for but a scanty supply of shillings and sixpences as his share of the spoil. Nor had the

demeanour of his companion on the box by any means tended to lighten his spirits, or make him better pleased with his situation. He had found him in position, when he himself assumed the ribands at the half way house from London, some five or six and twenty miles off, and from that moment till their arrival at the top of Mallington-hill, not more than ten words had passed between them. In vain had the coachman commended the beauty of the day — in vain had he pointed out the snug little box of a retired citizen, and informed his companion that Mr. Jones had the reputation of being a "terrible screw," not having his carriage and horses out above once in a quarter — in vain did he make sundry other attempts to promote the sweet intercourse of pleasant words: the traveller was unresponsive, or, if he did reply, it seemed but with the intention of proving that he was not altogether deprived of the power of speech by uttering a mere monosyllable or dissyllable, such as "Yes," "No," "Very," "Indeed." When the guard had put on the skid, however, at the top of Mallington-hill, the coachman was astounded as he turned round his head and raised his left hand with a slight shake of the reins to hear his companion's voice pronouncing a whole uninterrupted sentence.

"Pray what village is this, coachman?" he said, gazing down the hill, apparently well pleased.

The coachman actually started at the sound, for though he was a strong man, he was not exempt from human infirmities.

"This is Mallington, Sir," he said, and then he felt a strong inclination to punish his co-occupant of the box for his long taciturnity, by relapsing into silence, but his natural loquacity required vent, and he proceeded to inform the stranger that the great house on the right was old Mr. Charlton's as was.

"Has he changed his name?" demanded the other.

"Oh, dear, no, Sir," replied the coachman, "He 's got no name at all now, for he 's dead. A very good gentleman he was, too, and wore a pigtail."

"And who does the house belong to now?" demanded the stranger.

"Why, to his daughter," replied the Jehu, "some say; some say to her step-mother, the widow; howsoever, the young lady

is a great heiress, that 's clear, and has as much as six or seven thousand a-year of her own."

Were loquacity communicated by the same means as hydrophobia, one might have supposed that the coachman had bitten his companion, for he now asked all manner of questions as they went down the hill; inquired the name of the occupant of every house that they passed at all bigger than a pigsty, and willingly instigated the gentleman of the road to give him all the little anecdotes and detailed descriptions he could furnish of the dwellers in Mallington and its neighbourhood.

As they reached the bottom of the hill, and could just see the sign of the Bagpipes, which, as the reader knows, stood a little back from the highway, the coachman informed his companion that they stopped there twenty minutes to tea; for those were days when there was such a thing occasionally as leisure in life, even on the highway, and people did not think that the only object in travelling was to be propelled at the greatest possible speed that human nature can endure from one point of the earth's surface to the other. Men were allowed to eat and drink upon the road, to look about them, and sometimes to think. I record it only as a fact in history, for soon it will be forgotten; but certain it is that in the days I speak of the fastest rate of progression was ten miles an hour; and sometimes twenty minutes, or even half an hour was allowed, according to the appetite of the guard and the favour of the inn, for taking refreshment at various times in the day. To the astonishment, and somewhat to the consternation of the coachman, for he had himself nearly twenty miles to go, the stranger replied that he was booked for Mallington, and should alight at the Bagpipes; and the worthy lord of the reins turned himself a little on his seat, to mark better than he had hitherto marked the appearance of the person who was to get down at Mallington; for the dropping of a visitor in that village was an event that rarely, if ever happened, except in one of two cases: namely, when the descendants — I think I may use that word — were of the class bumpkin, or when they were inhabitants of the town or neighbourhood well known to the driver of the old heavy Blue. Once, indeed, he had brought down a whole inside full

of sickly children; and a number of stray hooping coughs and single meazles had travelled with him. One or two consumptions and a black jaundice had likewise been his companions; but these were the only people who, as he expressed it, had visited Mallington for pleasure, except Mr. Fothergill, one of the executors of Mr. Charlton, who had come down thither on his friend's death.

Nothing could be more accurate than the young gentleman's whole appearance. He was dressed in black, with a narrow band of crape round his hat, which showed, as the coachman internally observed, that he was in mourning for somebody. Then he had a black handkerchief — not a stock — round his neck, which proved he was not a clergyman, for clergymen did not wear black handkerchiefs in those days; and then he had black gloves, fitting neatly to his hand, which proved he was not an undertaker, for the gloves of undertakers are always too long in the fingers; and then, again, he had a very good hat, glossy in spite of dust and journey, and very well polished boots, which went far to prove that he was a gentleman. He was not what would be generally called a very handsome man, for colouring, which is what first strikes the eye, was wanting. His countenance had not the slightest resemblance to any face that ever was painted on a sign-post. His complexion was dark, with hair, eyes, and whiskers nearly black, and the eyebrows strongly marked. His forehead was both wide and high, rising straight from the brow, and surrounded by wavy curls; his nose was straight, with a somewhat wide nostril, and his mouth was beautifully cut, though somewhat stern, while the chin was rather prominent, but well rounded. Though he could not be called exactly pale, yet he had little colour; but his lips were red and healthy, and his eye clear and bright. In height be might be a little above five foot ten, broad in the chest and shoulders, thin in the flank, and long in the limbs, and in age, perhaps, six or seven and twenty.

All these particulars were gathered by the rapid eye of the coachman before he pulled up at the door of the inn; and he had concluded, from his survey, that "the gentleman was quite a gentleman notwithstanding," when the object of his examination

got down from the box, and confirmed the judgment internally pronounced upon him by giving coachman and guard each half-a-crown, when the usual fee for "an outside" was rarely eighteen-pence.

"Those two portmanteaus," he said, pointing to the roof, as he stood before the inn-door; and with great alacrity they were handed off, and with greater alacrity received by the porter of the house as indications of a visitor. He put them down, however, before the house, and in a quiet common-place way looked at all the five sides that were visible, as if it were a matter of course, to ascertain the gentleman's address; but there was no ticket to be seen, nor brass-plate either, and remarking that the proprietor of the portmanteaus remained looking about him, the porter stepped up to him and touched his own hair — hat he had not — saying, "Any more luggage, Sir?"

"An umbrella in the inside," replied the stranger; and after having turned the portmanteaus on their other ends, for the convenience of carrying them, and of looking for the name; and having taken them into the passage disappointed, the porter came forth again, and searched the coach for the umbrella. He found one with an ivory handle; and to his great satisfaction, for he was just going to give up the inquiry in despair, he found two capital letters engraved upon the ivory. Those capital letters were E. M.; and although, of course, there was no possible concatenation of vowels and consonants within the vocabulary of proper and christian names by which those initials might not have been followed — so that the field of conjecture was somewhat large — yet, as I have said, the porter was delighted to have discovered even so much, as he well knew that his importance in the village would be increased in proportion. Before making this important discovery, he had not ventured to intrude upon his mistress, who was taking tea in her own parlour with Mr. Stubbs, the newly-established linendraper, and paying little attention to the heavy Blue, which rarely brought any visitors to her inn; but he now put his head into the parlour saying, "Gentleman, Ma'am — going to stop — had his boxes down — looking about him — quite a gentleman — E. M. on his umbrella!"

As a spider in the corner of its cunning net, whenever it feels by the vibration of the fine filaments that a fly is struggling in the toils, rushes forth like lightning to secure the prey, so rushed forth Mrs. Pluckrose, the widowed mistress of the Bagpipes, to seize upon the traveller at the first indication of her porter. The thoughts of the Misses Martin, of Mrs. Dixon, of Mr. Crump, and of half a dozen other lodging housekeepers, came flashing before her imagination, and she saw, in fancy, the traveller ravished from her at her very door, if she did not make haste. The moment she beheld the young gentleman in black, she conceived a high esteem for him, and a desire to cultivate his acquaintance. But there he stood, all unconscious of the tender agitation he was producing, looking up the street towards poor Mr. Charlton's house, or down towards the park of the late Earl of Mallington, or along the river towards the church and the rectory. Mrs. Pluckrose got on a line with him and made a curtsey; but he took not the slightest notice of her, for his eyes had just turned to the other side, and she might have been an elephant for aught he knew. She was a little abashed, but just at that moment she beheld the figure of Mr. Crump coming across, with a sauntering air, as if to see whether the coach had brought anything for him. She knew that no time was to be lost, and moving round directly in front, where it was impossible not to see her, for she was of no inconsiderable width, she dropped another curtsey, saying, "If you are going to stay in Mallington, Sir, I hope I shall have the honour of entertaining you."

The gentleman looked at her and nodded his head good-humouredly, replying "I shall stay a few days, Madam, and shall remain at the inn, if it is yours."

There was a little compliment implied in the latter part of this answer, and though it was more in the manner than in the words, and Mrs. Pluckrose was an Englishwoman, yet she took it, and dropped another curtsey.

"We have two nice rooms, Sir," she said, "one looking down the river, the other up the village; and I am sure we can make you quite comfortable."

"I doubt it not in the least, Madam," replied the stranger

"I am very easily made comfortable; but that which would tend to do so most at the present moment would be some dinner."

"It shall be ready in one minute, Sir," answered Mrs. Pluckrose; and then, seeing Mr. Crump rapidly approaching, she added, in terror lest her triumph should be snatched from her hands, "Will you not walk in, Sir, and look at the rooms?"

Before the stranger could reply, inexorable Mr. Crump was upon him with a card in his hand. "Allow me to hand you that, Sir," said Mr. Crump, "in case you should need lodgings."

"No; I shall not need any," replied the gentleman, after having looked at the card, and at the same time holding it out to Mr. Crump again.

"Pray keep it, Sir," rejoined Mr. Crump, "one can never tell."

"'Pon my life, this is too bad!" exclaimed Mrs. Pluckrose.

But the stranger settled the matter for her, replying, "I would rather not keep it, Sir. I do not want lodgings, and am not fond of dirty pieces of pasteboard."

Mrs. Pluckrose tittered in an ecstacy of delight, the porter grinned; but Mr. Crump, with an air of offended dignity, replied, "Oh! no offence, Sir, I hope. I only meant —"

"There, that will do, my good man," answered the young gentleman. I am not offended. Good evening. Now, Madam, I will see the rooms," and following the triumphant Mrs. Pluckrose, he walked into the inn.

CHAPTER VI.

The stranger was shown to his rooms; they were clean, tidy, and comfortable. The little bed-room, with its white boards and white dimity, looking up the village street towards the top of the hill, and catching a glance of the green fields at the back of Mallington, over the tops of some low houses; and the sitting-room looking down upon the calm picturesque stream, beyond which appeared the park with its thick trees, and the several habitations of gardeners and gamekeeper dotting the edge of the woodland. The stranger gazed forth with much pleasure; he

seemed to take great delight in the beauties of nature, for his eyes wandered up the stream and down the stream, and over the large rounds of oak and elm with an expression of satisfaction which had something almost melancholy in its very intensity.

At length Mrs. Pluckrose, who stood behind him, waiting till he had contented himself, heard him exclaim, "How refreshing!" and she immediately concluded that he was some gentleman from the City. He was too good-looking, and too well-dressed, she thought, for a merchant's clerk; but most likely he was a young merchant who had overworked himself in his counting-house, and had come down to Mallington for a little fresh air.

When she had settled that point quite to her heart's content, she spoke to him of his dinner, asking much in the terms of the schoolboy jest, "Will you have it now, Sir?" She did not add, indeed, "or wait till you can get it," whatever she or the stranger might think.

"Why, my good lady," replied her guest, "I thought that by this time it was well nigh cooked; but it does not matter. I dare say you have some cold meat in the house, and that will do very well."

"As beautiful a sirloin, Sir, as ever you put a knife into," answered Mrs. Pluckrose.

"Well, that will do excellently," replied the stranger; and putting his hand upon the landlady's arm he added, with a gayer look than he had yet borne, "Now I will answer all your questions before they are asked. I will not take any vegetables with it. I will not wait till you just get a potato hot. I do not take any pickles; nor any tart; nor any cheese. I am, in short, my good lady, anxious to get out to take a walk this beautiful evening in this beautiful country; and therefore would dine as soon as possible. Another day your cook shall display her powers in all manner of ways if she pleases; but at present expedition is the thing required. Moreover, I like the place and the rooms so well, my good lady, that I shall certainly remain for a week, so that there will be plenty of time for cook to show herself skilful."

Mrs. Pluckrose accordingly left him very well satisfied, ordered the cold beef up to the gentleman at once; and going into the room

where the coachman was taking his tea, declared that he had brought her a very nice gay gentleman indeed.

"Gay!" cried the coachman; "why, he did not speak a word all along the road till he got to the top of the hill."

"More 's the pity, Master Giles," replied the widow, "for he talks very well when he does set about it, I can tell you. He 's quite a gentleman, too. Let 's look at your bill, Giles, there 's a good creature."

The coachman put his hand into his breast pocket, and drew forth a greasy pocket book, in the heart of which was his way bill; but Mrs. Pluckrose scrutinized it in vain for the stranger's name, and while she was in the act the maid who performed the part of waiter came running in for a bottle of sherry.

If the guest drank it all, it must have been out of tumblers, for he had not time to pour out eleven wine glassfulls before his step was heard upon the stairs; and the next moment he walked along the passage to the door.

"I hope the beef was tender, Sir," said Mrs. Pluckrose, putting out her head.

"As a maiden's sigh," replied her guest, with a smile, and out he went.

There was a row of cropped lime trees before the door of the inn each as round as a counsellor's wig, and tolerably well powdered with dust. The space between the house and them was about ten yards, and as soon as he reached them the stranger turned and looked up at the board over the inn door, studying the landlady's name, for he wished to be able to vary the term "good lady," which was the only appellation which he had hitherto been able to bestow upon her. She herself had been watching him from her parlour window, not without some remaining fears in regard to the syren influence of Crumps and Martins; but, to her great satisfaction, she saw him, instead of walking up the street, take his way down towards the stream, and then turn up the neat broad elm-shaded road that led to the church and the rectory.

Soon disappearing from the sight of Mrs. Pluckrose, the stranger pursued his way at an easy pace, and looked up for an instant at the pretty little village church, about which there were

some good old bits of Norman doors and buttresses, and then turned an inquiring eye upon the rectory.

"Yes," he said, after pausing for a moment, "it must be so. There is no other house near. At all events I will see," and, opening the neat gate, he walked along the neat carriage-road bordered with evergreens up to the porch covered with ivy and China roses, and rang the bell.

An old white-headed man servant appeared without making him wait, and the stranger inquired "Am I wrong in supposing this the Rectory?"

"No, Sir," replied the man; "it is the Rectory."

"Then is Doctor Western at home?" demanded the stranger.

"Yes, Sir," answered the servant, "but —"

"He is at dinner, perhaps," said the visitor.

"Oh, dear no, Sir," was the answer, with a smile, he has dined these three hours; he is at tea."

"Well, then, my good friend," rejoined the stranger, will you let him know, with an apology for interrupting him by so late a visit, that I wish much for a few moments' conversation with him."

"Will you step into this room, Sir," said the man, and he ushered the visitor into the doctor's library.

The clergyman finished the cup of the infusion of the Chinese herb which had been poured out for him, and then, leaving his sister with a young lady who was taking tea with them, he walked with a slow step to the study, where, opening the door, he regarded the stranger with his calm and thoughtful eyes—not long enough to make the glance unpleasant, but sufficiently long to afford the worthy doctor those physiognomical indications which he was fond of obtaining in regard to every new being of the same species as himself with whom he came in contact. The result was in this instance highly satisfactory to him.

"That is a fine countenance," he said internally, "thoughtful and yet frank."

"You wished to see me, Sir, I think," he proceeded aloud, "pray be seated," and he himself took his accustomed arm chair,

leaning back in it, but bending forward his head in an attitude of polite attention.

"I have the honour, Dr. Western," replied the stranger, "of bringing you this letter from Sir Henry Scarsdale, who was once, I think, a pupil of yours at Oxford. If you will read it, you will see that I have some business to speak with you upon."

"Delighted to hear from my young friend," replied the old gentleman, his face lighting up, "he was always a great favouritæ of mine; and any friend of his must be always so."

As he had spoken, he had torn open the letter, and was going on reading it; but something that he saw therein made him stop suddenly in his speech, and fix his whole attention upon the contents. The letter was somewhat long; and the doctor said nothing more till he had got to the end, except such words as "certainly" — "with the greatest pleasure" — "indeed!" but when he had concluded the perusal, he rose, held out his hand to the stranger, and said, "I am delighted to see you, Sir. If you will do me the honour of taking up your abode at my poor house, it will give me great pleasure, and any assistance I can afford is, of course, yours to command in any way."

"I feel very much obliged to you, my dear Sir," replied the guest, "and obliged to Scarsdale for procuring me the pleasure of an introduction to you; but I think it will be best to retain my quarters at your little inn here, where I have two comfortable rooms enough, and the landlady seems a good woman."

"Oh! an excellent creature!" replied the clergyman. "Were you sick, you would find what a kind motherly being she is."

"Now, my dear Sir, I will not detain you longer," said the stranger, "you are at tea, I know?"

"May I not ask you to join my little party?" said the clergyman; "there are but my sister and a very sweet young lady, whom we love almost as a child — the cynosure of neighbouring eyes, indeed — Miss Charlton."

"What, the fair lady of the house upon the hill?" asked the visitor.

The good doctor answered in the affirmative, adding, "My ward, though she will soon escape from tutelage."

The stranger willingly accepted the rector's invitation, and Dr. Western rose to show him the way, but paused at the door, and turning with a smile to his new acquaintance, said, "I had forgotten to ask the name."

"Oh! Edmond Morton," replied the young gentleman, and the clergyman leading the way, they were soon in the drawing-room, where Mr. Morton was introduced first to Dr. Western's sister, Mrs. Evelyn, and next to Miss Charlton. Louisa had now expanded into the beauty of womanhood, but yet it was that of young maturity. The flower was no longer in the bud, but it was not full blown. She had inherited not only all her mother's features, but her mother's grace; the grace of high lineage, as well as a fine mind and lovely person; and though her dress was very simple, and still mourning, yet there was that look of birth and dignity about her, that calm repose, which may be occasionally found in all classes, but which wherever found speaks one character of heart and spirit. The rich waving brown hair fell without art into the forms that sculpture has loved to give it, and in the whole cutting of the features the eye of Edmond Morton, and he was no mean judge, could discover scarcely one flaw. If there was anything, perhaps, it was a want of animation that struck him at first as a defect; but yet there was a deep light in those soft and somewhat sad eyes, which made him think that the whole face might become full of expression when the bosom was moved by any powerful emotion. However, he had seen many a very lovely girl before that, and was not very easily to be captivated. His was too gentlemanly a spirit, also, to examine the person of a lady as he would have criticised a horse; and thus he was neither so much struck with Louisa's appearance at first as many might have been; nor did he remark all the beauty of her form and face till he had been some time in her company.

On her part, Louisa paid little attention to his appearance. He was a friend of Dr. Western's, and that was enough to gain her favourable consideration. She thought him a very good-looking young man also; and, perhaps, drew some comparisons between the tone and carriage of the stranger and those of the good folks of the neighbourhood, rather to the disadvantage of the

latter, but it went no further. She thought not of flirting with him, or attracting his attention, and for some time, while he sat talking with Mrs. Evelyn, entering at once, with a peculiar sort of *bienséance* into the position of a friend rather than a new acquaintance, Louisa remained silent, or only said a few words to Dr. Western. The good rector, however, was not pleased with her reserve. he was, to say sooth, somewhat proud of his fair ward; he thought her, in his heart, the loveliest and the best of girls, and his very indignation at Mrs. Charlton, for differing greatly with him on that point, made him anxious to have all the rest of the world upon his side. He was determined, therefore, that he would draw her out; and though Louisa was, indeed, somewhat sad that evening, from various unpleasant things which had occurred in her own house, yet, Dr. Western, who well knew how, soon won her to a gay smile, and then to a laugh. He changed the subject then, and spoke of his parish and his poor, and dwelt upon one or two of those scenes of distress which every clergyman who does his duty must witness, without being able to alleviate, or, at least, not much: the dying mother — the reprobate son — the broken-hearted parents — the anguish of remorse; and as he went on, to Edward Morton's surprise, that calm and placid countenance which he had thought inanimate, showed that it could express with intense feeling every different emotion of the mind. She forgot herself, too, entirely; conversed eagerly and well on every topic that was brought before her, and poured forth the pure high feelings of a noble and generous heart in sympathy for sorrow or for joy. Towards Morton himself, too, her reserve died away, and finding in him stores of thought and information, such as few possessed around her, joined with a grace and ease of demeanour which can only be gained by long and intimate communication with the noble and the high, she gave herself up to a new charm, and almost forgot the passing hours till the change of light warned her that day was coming to a close. Then, starting up, with a smile, she said, "I must away, dear Mrs. Evelyn, or I shall be scolded by my mother for wandering so late."

"Nay, but my song, Louisa — my song!" cried Dr. Western.

"Oh, it must be for another night," replied Miss Charlton; "see, it is really growing dark."

"Well, we will walk with you up the village," said the rector, "if Mr. Morton has no objection; and as we return I will give him a full, true, and particular account of all the villagers whose houses we pass, that he may learn to esteem the inhabitants of Mallington properly."

"Oh! pray do not," replied Louisa; "you are so severe upon us, dear friend, that I fear if you give him your view of our faults and failings, he will run away from the place to-morrow morning."

"Nay, I will be just, my dear," answered Dr. Western; and as soon as Louisa's shawl and bonnet were adjusted, they set out upon their way.

CHAPTER VII.

The rector of Mallington gave his left arm to Louisa Charlton, and Mr. Morton walked on the other side of that fair lady; a shade had come over her face as they passed close to the churchyard, and as the low cold dwellings of its silent tenants met her sight. It was not exactly the shade of grief, indeed, but of calm serious thought. The conversation of her new acquaintance had been of many things — various, rich, fanciful, amusing; and, though she did not know or perceive it, the deep current that lay beneath the sparkling surface had tended to promote reflection, even while it seemed only to excite the imagination. It had, of course, been all of worldly things; but it had led the mind by a natural and quiet course to find the latent relations between those very worldly things and the higher, the more spiritual, with which they all have some mysterious connexion. Thus it was that though, whenever Louisa Charlton passed within sight of her father's tomb a melancholy feeling of regret would steal over her, her thoughts were now more grave and solemn than they had been for long on a similar occasion, and that she felt, with less buoyancy than youth is apt to know, how short a space — how speedy a close — how unprofitable a career have all the joys and pleasures of existence.

Dr. Western remarked the shadow, but he took no notice. and their young companion saw it also, but remained silent; so that they had reached the end of the village street, and were beginning to walk slowly up the hill before either of the three spoke.

"Had we not better go by the field path?" said Louisa Charlton, turning to her guardian, "it is so much more beautiful and so much quieter."

"No, my dear child," answered the old gentleman; "that would be hardly fair," and he smiled as he spoke.

Louisa looked in his face with an inquiring glance; and Edmond Morton went further, asking "How do you mean, not fair, my dear Sir?"

"Because I think it would almost amount to robbery," replied the good doctor, "to deprive the people of my parish of the high delight they will experience in seeing you and Miss Charlton and myself walking up the village together, as familiarly as if you had been living here for ten years. You cannot imagine, Sir, what a source of innocent delight this walk of ours will afford to some hundred of people in Mallington; what an inexhaustible fund of conversation it will supply to persons who have nothing else on earth to talk about; what a diversion it will effect, as you soldiers call it, in favour of poor Mrs. Pilkin, who took a Sunday walk the other day with a gay bachelor, whose banns with her fair self I have to publish for the first time on Sunday next — but the people know nothing of that — and how you and I and Louisa, without our own consciousness or any effort on our part, but merely that of walking up this hill instead of going by the fields, will enliven every tea-table this night — will afford zest and interest to the cold chicken and slice of ham, even if we do not make Miss Martin revoke or Mr. Crump misdeal."

Both Louisa and Mr. Morton smiled, and the latter inquired "Is it really such a gossiping little place?"

"Just in proportion to its idleness," answered Dr. Western in a graver tone, "as, indeed, is always the case. Being a place of no trade, and, I might almost say, no society, the people for one half of their time have nothing to do but comment on their

neighbours. The residence of half a dozen respectable families in or near the village would speedily work a great change in these respects; for idleness is the parent of gossip, as well as of most minor vices, and of many great ones also; but here the poor people have positively nothing else to do, and their eyes and their tongues, aided each in turn by imagination, are alternately busy with their neighbours' affairs all day long. See, Louisa," he continued, "they are all out at their doors already, as if with a sort of presentiment they would have something to talk about; and now don't you see there is Mrs. Molineux, who keeps the pie-shop, has gone in to Mrs. Stubbs, the plumber and glazier's wife, to tell her the fact that you and I and the strange gentleman who came by the coach are walking up the village together." Then, sinking his voice to a whisper, he added in Mrs. Charlton's ear, "You are given away already, Louisa — the whole matter is settled and done in the opinion of the gossips of Mallington."

Louisa laughed and coloured a little — very little indeed — but just sufficiently to show that she understood what the good rector meant, and felt that it was a thing not quite impossible that she should marry such a man as he who was then walking beside her. That skittish jade, imagination, which will go galloping hither and thither, whether the rider likes it or not, instantly set off with poor Louisa Charlton, and would have fain carried her up to the point of considering whether Edmond Morton was or was not the sort of man that she might have liked in the capacity of a husband. He was handsome, intelligent, gentlemanly, and totally unlike all the people of Mallington — a great advantage in the eyes of Louisa Charlton. He was very unlike, also, Alfred Latimer, which was a still greater advantage; but then when she had got thus far on the road along which fancy was hurrying her, she recollected that she had not known her companion for more than two hours, and, getting quietly down off her nag, knowing well that if she went on riding she should have no command over her own course, she led imagination back by the bridle, and shut the stable door.

As they proceeded on their way Dr. Western, according to promise, expounded to Edmond Morton the character, situation,

and peculiarites of the various inhabitants of Mallington, whose dwellings they ipassed, and he did it very pleasantly — never uncharitably, nor bitterly, though often a little satirically. The doctor, the solicitor, the retired naval commander, the old maids and their opponent, the new shopkeeper and his pretensions — from a humble and retiring widow woman of very limited income, who lived in the last house at the bottom of the hill, to the little fat bustling demagogue of a retired London tradesman, who had brought down drab gaiters and democracy, the spirit of opposition to everything and an utter contempt for the aspirate, to the new sphere of Mallington — were all passed in review by the worthy doctor with so much more detail than Louisa had ever heard him use before, that she could not help thinking that the rector must have some particular desire to give Mr. Morton a full and comprehensive knowledge of his parish and its parishioners.

As they walked up the hill but slowly, they were passed at a quick pace by Mrs. Charlton's maid, Mistress Windsor, who was still in as great favour with her lady as ever, and elevated to the rank of housekeeper; and, to use a vulgar expression, had both feathered her nest and tricked out her plumage handsomely during the three or four last years of Mr. Charlton's life. Though not so young as when first she was introduced to the reader, and bearing certain traces of it in wrinkle and line, she was still a very active woman, and had lost no portion of her shrewdness. She was as keen as her mistress: even, perhaps, a little keener, and she had always made it a point of showing herself especially respectful towards Miss Charlton both before and after her master's death. It had been her common observation that nobody could tell what might happen. Now this was not a maxim of particular application, but a wide, broad, philosophical axiom, which was the basis of one-half of her conclusions; and when Mr. Charlton first fell ill she redoubled her attention to Louisa, saying to herself, "No one can tell what may happen." When Mr. Charlton died, she was still more attentive, repeating "No one can tell what may happen;" and when she heard the will read, and found that the deceased had left the great bulk of his property, except the annuity to his widow, to the young lady, Mrs. Windsor was satisfied with her own con-

duct; and, although she did think it strange that Mr. Charlton should have so strictly tied his daughter's hands in regard to her marriage, she still determined to show herself devoted to Louisa, observing once more "No one can tell what may happen." She had, indeed, taken care at the same time to give no just cause of offence to fair Mrs. Charlton, but was quite as ready at all times to do everything she could to forward that lady's views as she had been from the first. Mrs. Charlton, indeed, saw through her — yes, through and through her, reader. She was not merely diaphanous, but quite transparent to the eyes of Mrs. Charlton; and yet that worthy lady was not at all inclined to let Mrs. Windsor see that she bore any ill will towards her for courting Louisa, even if she did feel annoyed at it, which I do not pretend to say she did not. Mrs. Charlton and Mrs. Windsor had known each other for many years. Mrs. Windsor had served Mrs. Charlton very well and very faithfully, as has been shown; and Mrs. Charlton had every inclination to pass over any little faults, but not from gratitude; for if Mrs. Charlton could have strangled Mrs. Windsor with her own hands, and nothing more said about it, who could tell if she would not have done it?

As the respectable abigail now passed by Dr. Western and Louisa, she paused, half turned round, and dropped a low curtsey, then resumed her quick pace again, and reached the house some time before them. As soon as she had entered the doors, instead of betaking herself to the housekeeper's room, as she usually did in ordinary circumstances, she inquired of one of the footmen whether her mistress was alone in the drawing-room; and finding that such was the case, she walked straight up thither, without taking off bonnet or shawl.

"What is it, Windsor?" demanded the lady, as soon as she appeared, speaking in a querulous tone, and putting a pen with which she had been writing into the inkstand.

"Why, Ma'am, I thought I would just tell you that Miss Charlton is coming back," replied Mrs. Windsor.

"Well, I suppose she is," answered her mistress, still crossly; "it is time she should, for it is getting quite dark, I can hardly see to write."

"Yes, Ma'am," rejoined the housekeeper; "but there is a gentleman with her as well as Dr. Western, and I thought you might like to know."

"A gentleman!" said Mrs. Charlton, with a greater degree of interest; "what sort of a gentleman, Windsor?"

"You can see him, Ma'am, from the window," replied Mrs. Windsor: "he 's a fine looking young man, who came down by the coach to-night, I heard, and has put up at the inn; and he took the two rooms there for a fortnight, and then went to Dr. Western's direct."

By this time Mrs. Charlton reached a western window which looked down the hill, and was gazing stedfastly upon the group which was slowly walking up. The remaining light fell full upon them, and she could see them pause, and look round over the scene below, and the high old trees of the park on the opposite side of the valley, and the sunset glow of the sky above; and she remarked that the stranger pointed with his hand, and seemed to make some inquiry, and that when they came forward again Louisa's fair face was raised towards him with a bright warm smile upon her lips.

Mrs. Charlton smiled too; but it was not with a very pleasant, though with a pleased expression. It seemed as if she said to herself, "That will do," but yet as if that which was to be done was not very full of human charities. "Go down, Windsor," she said, "and tell Edward when Dr. Western comes to beg him to walk in, for I wish to speak with him — and the young gentleman who is with him, of course. And hark ye, Windsor, I wish you would find out who he is, and all about him; for, of course, I am very willing to show attention to any one who visits Mallington — and yet, of course, I must be careful of whom I bring into Miss Charlton's company — but, of course, I must wish Mr. Latimer to have some more and some better society than he finds here — and of course — but run down Windsor, and tell Edward what I have said, for they are coming near."

Mrs. Windsor hurried away with a grave face to do as she was bid, but her grave face only lasted to the back of the door, and then she murmured to herself "As if I did not know?"

The footman received his instructions in terms that he was well disciplined to understand, and the next minute the great bell rang. He walked with slow and stately step to the door, and having opened it drew back to let Miss Charlton pass, but as she shook hands with Dr. Western, and wished the stranger good night, the man stepped forward again and said, "My mistress, Sir, told me to say if you came that she wished to speak with you for one moment if you would have the kindness to walk up."

"I will wait for you here, my dear Sir," said Mr. Morton; but Louisa, with colour slightly rising in her cheek — for she did not always know how her fair step-mother would view her proceedings — interposed, exclaimed, "Oh, no; pray come in, Mr. Morton; Mrs. Charlton will be very happy to see you, I am sure."

"Perhaps" — replied the visitor, but before he could conclude his sentence the rector kindly laid his hand on his arm, saying, "Nay, come in, my young friend; if Mrs. Charlton has any matter of business to speak of, we can find another room in this house. It is not like my little rectory, and there are plenty of council chambers."

Edmond Morton could only bow, and follow whither the doctor and Louisa led; and in a moment after he was formally introduced to Mrs. Charlton. The fair widow was all smiles and graciousness, though, to say sooth, some part of her youthful grace had fled, for she had become rather fuller in her proportions than was altogether consistent with exact symmetry. As she was not a very tall woman, the difference of the breadth in relation to the length, as compared with what she had been, when she changed from Latimer to Charlton, was not to her advantage — in personal appearance, at least — and yet she was a very pretty woman, *très bien conservée*, as our French neighbours term it; fair, smooth-skinned, delicate-featured, with nothing that could indicate a year more than forty, or anything else than the sweetest possible disposition, the most placable and considerate mind. She was delighted to see Dr. Western; she was charmed to receive Mr. Morton; she was tenderly affectionate to dear Louisa. She was the pink of step-mothers, and the pleasantest of friends. All that she had to say to the rector was that she had for the time given up her intention of

going to Cheltenham, in consequence of letters that she had received that morning; and although Dr. Western had never heard of her purpose, he expressed himself very well satisfied that she had abandoned it; saying that he was not fond of Cheltenham, especially in what is termed the season; he thought it a bad place for young men and a worse place for young women.

Mrs. Charlton smiled sweetly, and accused him of being too severe in his notions; and then, turning to Mr. Morton, she inquired if he did not admire their quiet little rustic village, so beautifully situated amongst its woods and fields.

"I have really seen very little of it as yet, Madam," replied the young gentleman, "having been here but a few hours; but as I am a great lover of the beauties of nature, I have no doubt that I shall find enough to admire."

Mrs. Charlton was delighted that he was a lover of the beauties of nature; and declared that they would show him plenty of the sweetest scenery in the world; and appealed to Dr. Western whether they would not. She must positively, she said, make a party to take him to the waterfall up the glen, and insisted that he should not venture to visit it without her presence, and she ended by asking the rector, and his friend, and Mrs. Evelyn to dinner the next day at an early hour, that they might take a walk before tea.

"Hang it!" thought the worthy clergyman, "the widow is looking for a third husband already." But he did her great injustice. Mrs. Charlton was no longer Mrs. Latimer, and though she always had her objects, they were very different from what they had been, and from what Dr. Western imagined. For himself, he accepted her invitation; but declined for Mrs. Evelyn, who never went out to dinner, as Mrs. Charlton well knew; and Mr. Morton promising to accompany him, the two gentlemen took their leave just as the lady asked Louisa to ring for lights.

"Well, my dear Sir, what do you think of my fair neighbour," asked the clergyman, when they were fairly out of the house, "having seen her yourself, you will need no explanation."

"I think not," replied Edmond Morton, drily. "May I ask, my dear Sir, if she is really that sweet girl's mother?"

"You think you see signs of a different race — eh?" said Dr.

Western, with a smile. "Very different, indeed, I can assure you. I never saw Louisa's mother; but from all I have heard, she was very like her daughter, both in person and mind. I need not tell you that Mrs. Charlton is not. Nevertheless, she is a very good and respectable woman."

"A very artificial one, I should think," replied Edmond Morton; "should I be wrong, my dear doctor, if I said a very artful one?"

"Nay, nay," cried the rector, "that is a somewhat harsh term. She seems worldly, it must be confessed, and so far I believe you have judged right, though how you have formed your opinion in so short a time I cannot tell. It took me longer to form mine."

"I have been all my life accustomed to observe small traits," replied his companion, "and have seldom found their indications fallacious. I know, indeed, that they may be so used also, that the habit of remarking them begets in us a particular sort of vanity in our own penetration, which makes us unwilling to admit that we are deceived when we really are so. Therefore I never allow myself to act from the impressions first received, till they are confirmed by further observation. Yet I think I cannot be mistaken in my estimate of either of the ladies we have just left."

"And what of Louisa, then?" asked Dr. Western.

"Hardly fair, my dear Sir," rejoined his companion; "she is wonderfully beautiful when she is animated. But I should think that she was a flower that required very tender usage; and that she has not had it always."

"Yet she is of a firm and high mind," answered the clergyman eagerly; "I know not any one in whom such gentleness is blended with such a strong sense of what is right."

"I am sure it is," replied Morton; "in truth, my dear doctor, hers is a neighbourhood of which one may well be afraid."

"You know she is an heiress, and her fortune very large," said Dr. Western in a peculiar tone.

"I have heard so this evening," replied the young gentleman; "but I once heard a very noble and amiable friend declare that if it rained heiresses he would go out with an umbrella; and I have always been very much of his way of thinking." The rector

laughed, but Mr. Morton, changing the subject, reminded him that he was to give him a sight of some papers; and they both quickened their pace towards the rectory.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Misses Martin had discovered all about it; the Misses Martin had settled it all in their own minds — they were mighty minds for settling other people's affairs; but when Mrs. Windsor, on the following morning, walked into their shop, as she called it, "promiscuously," to buy a piece of narrow tape — thinking that if there were in all Mallington any person or persons who could gather the whole particulars of Mr. Morton's history, the Misses Martin must be the people — they proved obdurately silent, notwithstanding every hint and question she could devise. Had she asked no questions, had she given no hints of a wish to discover more of Mr. Morton, the Misses Martin might very possibly — from a desire to hear what that gentleman had been doing at Mallington House — have proved communicative themselves; but as soon as the two ladies perceived that Mrs. Windsor was on the search for information, they resolved not to give it; for there was war between Mrs. Charlton and the Misses Martin — civil war it might, indeed, be called, for it was more real than apparent, and conducted with all politeness. Mrs. Charlton had triumphed over the Misses Martin — she had married the rich widower — she had surrounded herself with wealth and splendour — she had been raised into the first position in the society of the neighbourhood, in spite of all the Misses Martins inuendos and slanders — and she had set up a rival in a shop, which had soon consigned theirs, if not to total decay, to the solitary and solemn declension of faded prints and soiled linens and articles of all kinds, excellent in themselves, but not attractive to the eye. These were things not to be forgotten by the Misses Martin, and, as I have said, they remained obdurately silent, although they had settled the whole affairs of Mr. Edmond Morton an hour or more before Mrs. Windsor appeared.

But Mrs. Windsor was a skilful general, and, by a well-con-

ceived manœuvre, she turned their flank. There was a neighbour of the Misses Martin just three doors off. He was a bookseller and stationer, well to do in the world — an elderly bachelor, a very respectable man. He differed from the church of England in several of his religious notions, and occasionally preached his own doctrines himself to a select congregation; but, nevertheless, he was just the sort of man to be very high in the esteem of the Misses Martin, who, though they belonged to the church of England, had no objection to marry any one — only nobody asked them. But Mr. Sowerby was, as I have said, a bachelor, and he was fond of news; so that Mrs. Windsor, remembering well that the Misses Martin were in the habit, one or the other, of running into Mr. Sowerby's shop eight-and-forty times each day — that is to say once every quarter of an hour while it was open — conceived that ere the period of her visit they must, by an inevitable necessity, have told that gentleman all that they had gathered of Mr. Morton. The moment, therefore, that the tape was bought and paid for, she turned her steps to Mr. Sowerby's, and asked for some note paper. The worthy master of the shop was delighted to see her, and began at once by telling her that it was a pleasant day, but warm, very warm. As Mrs. Windsor had discovered this interesting fact before, she assented without any long consideration, and then went on to say that the night before had been very warm likewise, to which Mr. Sowerby agreed; but then Mrs. Windsor proceeded to relate how warm she had found it as she walked up from the bottom of the hill, and ended "I declare I thought I should have dropped just as I was passing Miss Charlton and the young gentleman she brought up with her from the rectory."

"Well now," cried Mr. Sowerby, "that is just what I wanted to speak to you about, Mrs. Windsor. It is very odd you should mention it, isn't it? Let me shut the door," and, stretching over the counter, he pushed it to.

"Well," he said in continuation, "I saw Miss Charlton and the young gentleman and Dr. Western go up the village together, for I was standing at my door, and I wondered who he could be — the young man I mean; but when I found out who he is and all

about him, I said to myself, says I, 'that is no bird for Miss Charlton's money, and if Mrs. Windsor should chance to look in I 'll just give her a hint — it is but kind and neighbourly.'"

"I 'm very much obliged indeed, Mr. Sowerby," replied the housekeeper; "I did not much like the look of him myself, and I said when I saw him, 'he seems but a half-and-half sort of a gentleman after all,' but then I could not say anything to my mistress because I had got nothing to go upon."

"Well, then, I 'll tell you all about it," said Mr. Sowerby. "He 's no more than an artist, take my word for it, Mrs. Windsor — and you know my word is good for a thousand pounds at any time — take my word for it he is no more than an artist, going about the country sketching."

"But how did you find it out?" asked Mrs. Windsor; "I know you are a shrewd one, Mr. Sowerby — not easy to take you in."

Mr. Sowerby laughed and shook his head with a look as wise as that of the Athenian fowl, saying, "No, no; but I 'll tell you all about it. Last night when the boy brought in my beer for supper from the Bagpipes, I asked him what was the name of the gentleman who had come by the coach. He could not tell a word about it, only that boots said there was E. M. marked upon his umbrella. Well, I could make nothing of that; but I told the boy to find out and let me know, and I gave him a penny for himself, Mrs. Windsor; so this morning — for gold is the key to everything, Mrs. Windsor, gold is the key to everything — he brought me word that the gentleman's name is Edmond Morton, for a letter had come for him by post. Well, that was something gained, but I could get no farther, till just about an hour ago in comes Mathilda Martin — and you know how she talks. Well she did run on enough to deafen one; but she told me that their girl, going across the park to carry a gown piece that the old housekeeper at the hall had bought yesterday, saw this Mr. Morton in the park as early as seven o'clock this morning; and that when she came back, about half an hour after, she chanced upon him again sitting under a tree, with a large book on his knee, drawing away as hard as he could draw — taking a picture, in fact, of the old place."

"But many a gentleman draws now-a-days," answered the housekeeper; "our young lady draws quite beautiful — you would almost think they were real houses and trees."

"Well you shall hear — you shall hear, Mrs. Windsor," continued the stationer, nodding his head with the solemnity of Jove, though the curls of his wig shed no ambrosial odours around, "As soon as I heard what Mathilda Martin told me, says I, 'Oh, ho! Edward Morton! I think I have heard that name before,' and reaching up there to the shelf just behind you, Mrs. Windsor, I took down that long book — no, not that one — the one with the blue back, gilt, and lettered — and there I saw — just look into the title — 'Sketches in England and Wales, by Thomas Morton, R. A.' Well, you know what a giddy thing Mathilda Martin is, and she immediately fancied that this young man must be the very Thomas Morton, R. A., and that the boy must have made a mistake about the first name. 'But,' says I, 'look at the date, Miss Mathilda;' and there it stood, sure enough, twenty years ago. Now this young man can't be more than five-and twenty, I should think; and it is not likely he should publish sketches in England and Wales when he was five years old, unless he were a phenomenon. 'No, no, Miss Martin,' I says, 'he is that old Morton's son — he had a son, I know, and his name was Edward, I am very sure; so you see he is following his father's trade, but I should not think he will make so good a hand of it.'"

"You are quite right, Mr. Sowerby," replied Mrs. Windsor; "and I will tell Mrs. Charlton all about it, and how you found it out, for I think it is very clever;" and after a little more gossip Mrs. Windsor left the shop with a well-pleased smile, saying to herself, "This will be quite the thing, I fancy."

As soon as she reached Mallington House she sought her mistress, who was in her dressing-room, and reported progress. Mrs. Charlton smiled likewise, and drew in her eyes a little; but the next moment she looked grave, and said, "It must be all nonsense, Windsor. I do not believe a word of it. Pray tell the people that I think it is all nonsense."

"I will, Ma'am," replied Mrs. Windsor, and was going; but her mistress called her back, and added, "Make further in-

quiries, Windsor, but more quietly, you understand — I wish to hear about it, but without seeming to know."

"Very well, Ma'am," replied Mrs. Windsor; and she fulfilled her lady's orders with due discretion, discovering further confirmation of Mr. Sowerby's views. But, to the surprise of all Mallington, the more strong became the presumption that Mr. Morton was an artist the more marked became Mrs. Charlton's attentions towards him; and Dr. Western observed, with some wonder, that both that evening, during dinner and afterwards, and on an excursion planned by the lady next day, Mrs. Charlton threw Louisa almost entirely upon Mr. Morton, while she endeavoured to monopolize the rector to himself, so that he mentally inquired "Hang it, the good lady can't want to marry me, surely?" But Mrs. Windsor knew her mistress better, and watched the game that was playing with some interest.

Mr. Morton did not understand it at all, but found it, as far as it went, not at all unpleasant. With a lovely girl upon his arm, in that very sweet stage of acquaintanceship when first impressions of esteem are warming into intimacy, where each with the other is like an intelligent traveller wandering through a fresh country, and discovering new beauties at every step, where conversation is neither oppressed by deep feelings, nor restrained by strangeness, but all the doors of thought are open, and the heart itself every now and then peeps out to see the sunny world without — it is a pleasant thing — a very pleasant thing indeed, to walk through fair scenes with a fair being like Louisa Charlton, and to listen to a sweet musical voice, and to read a world of fairy tales in bright young eyes, all the brighter for friendly words and kind companionship. Very pleasant indeed. But, perhaps, the reader may ask if it is not somewhat dangerous, too; I can but answer, "That is as it may be."

CHAPTER IX.

In the early morning — and how sweet early morning is, let the tired citizen say, who, after long months of weary toil in the money-getting places of the world, escapes for a short time to taste better pleasures amidst the works of the almighty architect —

In the early morning of a summer's day, with the dew still upon the grass, and the light wind destined to die away, like youthful graces, in the sun's meridian light, Edmond Morton walked out of the little inn at which he had taken up his abode, and bent his steps over the bridge to the fine old park which I have noticed in the commencement of this work.

The maids of the inn were just up, and busy, in manifold curl-papers and unwashed faces, setting rooms to rights; and even the boots himself — the most matutinal of all bipeds, except Chanticleer — was not by any means sufficiently awakened to be as brisk and active as at all ordinary hours he showed himself. Mrs. Pluckrose was still — I should say in the arms of Morpheus, were there not something indecorous in the figure — but sound asleep; and walking out, with clothes that had been brushed and boots that had been blacked the night before, Mr. Morton gave no trouble to, and attracted little attention from, any one. On the old stone bridge of three irregular arches — very irregular indeed they were, for each differed from the other in point of shape as well as size — he paused and gazed for a minute or two into the stream, on the bosom of which numerous dab-chicks and water hens were swimming about, undoubtedly thinking that no man with a gun would feel inclined to annoy them so early in the morning. They might have found themselves mistaken; but certainly in regard to Edmond Morton they were in the right, for he did not feel disposed to do them any harm; and they appeared to understand it well; for as he looked over the parapet upon the water, though they turned up towards him the shrewd inquiring eye, they did not hurry off to their sedgy lurking places, as they would have done at a later hour, nor dive down in eager haste to escape the anticipated shot. He was not bloodily disposed, indeed; and yet there was a stout old trout, who had escaped many perils, and grown to aldermanic bulk, to hang, head against stream, at the tail of a pleasant ripple, that did move a little in his bosom the tiger that is more or less in the hearts of all men. He thought it would be a pleasant thing on a fine May morning to bring that fellow to the landing-place; but neither rod nor line had he with him at the moment, and even if he had, it was getting

somewhat late in the year to trifle with trouts, so that the tyrant of the stream would have been safe.

Now heaven only knows what connexion there was between the sight of that trout and so different a being as Louisa Charlton. The mind rarely jumps, however, though it runs up many a ladder with surprising swiftness; and there are general links — or, to pursue the metaphor, steps of association — between each thought that presents itself and another; and therefore undoubtedly — whether it was that he thought it would be agreeable to withdraw that fair girl from all that surrounded her, and carry her away with him, as he had proposed to do with the trout; or whether angling for a pretty wife was a sport he found pleasure in; or whether anything else in the wide expanse of possibility linked the two together, — certain it is that the next thought which presented itself to his imagination was Louisa Charlton. It served him all across the bridge, and up to the park gates, which lay at the end of a short avenue, of not more than two hundred yards in length. But there, just as he was about to pull the cucumber shaped handle of an old bell that hung beside the wrought-iron trellis work, he paused and looked at the windows of the lodge, saying to himself "It is needless to rouse the good old dame before her hour."

The dimity curtains were closely drawn across the lattice; and taking that indication in good part, he walked back to the bridge again, and gazed once more into the stream. The trout was still there, just where he left it; but Morton did not see it at all, for he had now got something else to think of; and he went on with Louisa Charlton very pleasantly, as if he were taking a sunny walk with her through the fairy land of fancy.

In about ten minutes he turned round his head towards the gates, and saw the old dame who kept the lodge open the casement and hook it back — her summer morning's first task — and sauntering gently on, he now rang the bell.

"Oh! is it you, Sir?" said the good lady, who had seen him there more than once before, putting out her head; "I will come in a minute;" and after she had fastened her gown and put on her pockets, in the same fashion that her mother wore them — and she was an old woman — she came to the gates and unlocked them

with a curtsey, saying as she did so "The other gate up the stream is always open — ay, and must be so, for some one broke the lock off — a mischievous young rogue he must have been — and ever since my lord's death the bailiff says he has no orders."

"And pray who is your lord now, my good lady?" asked Mr. Morton.

"Ay, Sir, that is hard to say," answered Dame Witherton; "an old gentleman, I have heard tell, of the name of Wilmot — a parson, it seems, and very fond of money."

"He ought to spend some here to put the house in better order," answered Morton. "It is truly a pity to see so fine a place as this might be, if well kept up, falling into decay."

"Ay, that it is, indeed," answered the old woman with a sigh. "I remember it quite a different thing; but even Edmonds, the park-keeper, is falling out of heart. He can't get the work-people paid, and is obliged to discharge them, poor man; though it breaks his heart to see the gravel walks getting weedy, and the trees all straggling, and the people stealing the game. But he cannot pay men himself — that is impossible. It is bad enough for him, with a family, to live here without his own wages; and work night and day for people that don't say 'Thank you.'"

"Quite enough, indeed, and too much, I should suppose," replied Mr. Morton; "but I suppose this Edmonds is fond of the place."

"Ay, that he is," answered Dame Witherton, "it is all his delight, Sir — his hobby, as Dr. Western calls it — and he could not go away for his very life. Why, I remember him — Lord bless you, Sir — a little curly-headed boy, born in that very cottage where he now lives, for his father, poor Tim Edmonds, was park-keeper before him."

"And where does he live, my good dame?" asked the visitor at Mallington.

"Bless you, Sir — why, don't you know?" exclaimed the lady of the lodge, as if every one who had twice entered the gates of the park was bound to be as well aware of all the secrets hid in its recesses as herself. "Why, you have seen that pretty house

just hidden from the hall by the tall trees in front. That 's where John Edmonds lives."

"I will walk up and see him," answered Morton. "I want to have a ramble all over the park from one end to the other."

"Then he is just the man to show it you," rejoined the old lady, "for there is not a rabbit has a burrow in the place but he knows all the ins and outs of it."

Fully relying upon the accuracy of her statements, Edmond Morton walked on to seek out the house of the park-keeper, which he was not long in accomplishing, for, to say the truth, he had not dealt fairly with the good old woman, having clearly understood before the conversation began, which was the dwelling of John Edmonds; but, having a sort of cynical belief that there is nothing so pleasant to "withered eld" as to tell a story its own way, he had let her go on — nay, had encouraged her so to do, without giving a hint of the stores of information he possessed. Those stores were, indeed, derived from no occult sciences which he possessed, nor from secret communications with any one; but having wandered about the park some days before, he had remarked a nice-looking tidy house, amongst the trees, out of sight of the windows of the hall, and had said to himself, "That must be the park-keeper's, I suppose."

Thither, however, he now bent his steps, and at the end of about a quarter of an hour, perceived the lodge amongst the trees. Everything was neat about it; and the evidences of man's careful spirit gave the place a cheerful look, though it was actually somewhat decayed, and one of the chimneys had a strong inclination to fall. The door had no bell, but as Morton had a very great disinclination to intrude upon any one, high or low, he knocked before he entered. A voice said "Come in," and accordingly Mr. Morton did as he was bid.

The interior presented a scene somewhat difficult to describe; for it had so many relations with antecedents, to the feelings of those who bore a part in it, that all its interest lay in things that were gone. Abstracted from those, it was but the house of an English peasant, at meal time — one not ill to do, either. At a round oaken table, in the midst of a low-roofed thick-raftered

chamber, which had five pots of flowers in each small-paned casement, were seated John Edmonds, his wife, a son of about ten years old, and a daughter of somewhat more than double that term. There had been three children between the two; but the sicknesses of childhood had reduced them to that number; and those that were lost had stored memory with regrets which rendered those that remained doubly dear to the park-keeper and his wife.

Edmonds himself was still a hale, well-looking, stout man of fifty, long limbed and active, clothed in a green coat, somewhat the worse for wear, with yellow buttons adorned with a rusty fox, corduroy breeches, and leathern gaiters up to his knees. A checked handkerchief was round his neck, quite clean, like the collar of his shirt, but with a hole in the corner. There were other holes not shown; but the time had been, not long ago, when he would not have worn a handkerchief with a hole in it on any account. His countenance was somewhat moody and irritable, neither by feature nor by habitual expression, but by temporary causes; but as he saw a stranger it instantly cleared. His wife was a plainly but very neatly dressed woman, about three years younger than himself, with considerable traces still remaining of beauty, worn away by daily toil and constant exposure to sun and wind. The boy was a stout, rosy urchin, very like his father, with a merry round face, black eyes, and curly hair. The daughter was one of those sweet flowers sometimes seen in cottage windows, which instantly make one think that they ought to have some better shelter against the wintry wind and burning sun. Her features were fine and delicate; her hair beautiful, and shining like new-spun silk; her eyes full of tender and confiding light; her complexion warm yet soft; and her form full both of youthful grace and womanly contour. Small hands, small feet, small lips, all were as symmetrical as if the blood of whole races of patricians had flowed in her veins; and the beautiful shape of her neck and throat, the fine setting on of the head, with the few natural curls that escaped from where the hair was turned up, gave a classical look to her bust, which might well call the eye of the connoisseur to admire, and wonder how such loveliness found shelter in an English cottage. Her dress was very plain, and even coarse, but neat and clean

The time had been when it had been a matter of fatherly vanity or love, to deck that fair form in garments more becoming; but that time had passed, and Lucy Edmonds did not give them a sigh. Her father did, however.

The fare before them was plain but good, and though it had once been better, none of them cared much about that; but two or three of the lozenges in the casement had been broken, and were filled up with paper neatly cut and pasted in, and that was a sad eye-sore to the park-keeper. In other days he would have paid the replacing of the missing glass from his own pocket, if his lord had not done it; but now he could not afford the expense, and he felt the want of neatness bitterly. At that moment he felt it more than ever, when he beheld a stranger. So long as no eyes but his own saw it, he could away with it, though he often looked at the broken panes with a rueful countenance; but that another eye should mark them grieved him, and he had recourse to a little artifice to hide them as much as possible.

No sooner did he perceive who it was that entered than, rising, he gave the young gentleman "Good morning," and taking a bundle from a chair, which he placed for his visitor with its back to the lattice, he laid the bundle on the window sill, and returned to his seat. His wife understood well enough what it all meant, and while Morton seated himself frankly, and entered into conversation with her husband, she rose quietly and arranged the things in the window better than Edmonds had done in his haste, putting a large geranium, with broad round leaves, a little on one side, so as to cover entirely one of the two patches, while the bundle hid the other.

"Good morning, Mr. Edmonds," said Morton, in reply to the park-keeper's salutation. "I beg your pardon for breaking in upon you at this hour, but I am fond of an early walk, and —"

"Don't mention it, Sir," said Edmonds, interrupting him, but not rudely; "very happy to see you. Is there anything I can do for you, Sir? I have seen you taking your walk before now, and looking about. I am always glad to see any one that takes notice of the park; it was a mighty pretty place once, but it is getting a little out of order now, for want of hands."

"Why, I wish, with your permission, to walk all over it," answered Morton, "and should feel very much obliged if you would accompany me. I do not know whether you are aware that there is some talk of the place being sold, and a friend of mine is thinking of buying it."

This was evidently news to poor Edmonds; and though, for a moment, a good many visions of a nice family purchasing the hall, and of the park being put into good order again, and of all the gravel walks being in trim array, and of the lady's walk being rolled out twice a-week, and of himself being retained as head park-keeper, came before his eyes; yet he did not feel altogether so comfortable as he ought to have been, for there is more of the spirit of clanship in all faithful servants than we know of, and there was something in the idea of Mallington Hall being sold out of the family of Mallington that grated harshly upon his mind.

"I did not know that it could be sold, Sir," he answered, "but I have seen so many things I never thought to see, that this does not surprise me. However, Sir, I am quite ready to walk with you this moment."

"No, no, finish your breakfast, Mr. Edmonds," replied Morton; "do not let me disturb you. I am in no hurry," and entering into conversation first with one and then with another, in a kindly tone, frank, but not too familiar, cheerful, but not jocular, the young gentleman was soon upon good terms with the whole family. He even took a slice of brown bread, just to keep the good man in countenance while he concluded his meal, and munched away heartily with the rest.

In about five minutes, Edmonds and his visitor were upon their feet, and walking out into the park. Up one alley and down another the young gentleman was led, round the walks, across the lees and lawns, through the wilderness — not the least afraid of wetting his feet — to the obelisk on the hill behind the house.

Much to the satisfaction of the park-keeper, Mr. Morton observed everything with the eye of taste, admired the natural beauties of the place, and again and again expressed his regret at seeing it running wild. At first his companion was well pleased to hear his lamentations over the neglect; but as Morton repeated them

several times, he felt as if there were some covert reproach to himself in his words, and he replied "Well, Sir, it is a pity, surely — a very great pity; but I cannot help it. In my lord's time I had seven pair of hands under me in this park, besides the three game-keepers who lived outside, and who used to do a turn now and then in the spring and summer; but now there is not a soul to help me, and I myself have no call to do anything, for I am no man's servant now; only I can't bear to see it all going to ruin, so wherever it seems most needed I work away. But I can't keep things right altogether any how, all by myself."

"That is quite impossible," said the young gentleman; "but yet it is a terrible pity, indeed, to see so much pains and labour, and so much good taste, as have been employed upon the place altogether thrown away and lost for want of attention. Why, whoever buys the property, if it go on at this rate, will have to spend many hundreds of pounds to put it right again."

"That he will, Sir," answered Edmonds. "Before six months be over it will be quite a wilderness; for I must look out for something to do myself. Here, my lord has been dead a good bit more than a year, and I have had but one month's wages from that time. I cannot go on so, Sir. All my earnings are going fast enough, I can tell you."

"Well!" exclaimed Morton, as if in a sudden fit of enthusiasm, "I declare I will not see it fall into such a state. I will tell you what, Edmonds — I will lend a hand."

"You, Sir!" cried the park-keeper, looking at him with a smile. "Lord bless you, you could do little enough. Not that I mean to say you are not a strong man, very; for you are just the sort of made person who would get through a good deal, but you have never been used to such sort of work, I 'll warrant."

The young gentleman laughed merrily. "No, no; you mistake me, Edmonds," he said. "I am not going to take your place over your head. I should have said I will lend the money, not lend a hand. Then, if my friend does not buy the place, why I suppose I must have it myself — that 's all."

"Ay, Sir; I thought there was something of that," replied Edmonds, shrewdly. "Gentlemen do not come down to look at

places for other people, unless they be auctioneers, and such like. Well, I am glad, if it must go, that a gentleman should have it, who seems to like it and value it, and cares about such things."

"But remember, Edmonds," said the young gentleman, putting his finger on his lips, "not a word about this to a living soul, unless it be good Dr. Western — not to your wife or daughter, even; for the matter is not yet quite settled. But now to business, Edmonds," and he took out a pocket-book. "You must get four or five hands — not more; for the matter may go off yet, and then, you know, I should be a loser."

"Five good hands, at twelve shillings a-week, Sir, will make a strange change in no time," answered the park-keeper, "and we have many a poor fellow about here that is now out of work since my lord died."

"Ay, the loss of one wealthy man in a place like this is a misfortune, indeed," said Morton. "Then there are your own wages, Edmonds?"

"Why, I used to have seventy pounds a-year, and the-house and garden, Sir," observed the park-keeper; "but now —"

"Well, call it one pound ten a-week," rejoined Morton; "that will make four pounds ten. There are twenty pounds, which will pay all for the next month; and if I should be away when it is done, speak to Dr. Western. He will settle with you. But remember! — not a word to any one else."

"No, no, Sir; I will be as mum as a mouse," replied the park-keeper; but what am I to say, if people ask me?"

"Oh! merely that you have your orders and your money, and that is all you care about," replied Morton.

"Well, Sir, I am sure I am very much obliged, indeed," said the man, taking the money. "I know Dr. Western very well — a kind, good gentleman he is. When my poor boy Willy died, he was with him twice every day — that he was."

"He *is* a good man," answered the young gentleman, "and he spoke to me about you, Edmonds, and gave you a high character. But now I should like to see the house, if we can manage it without letting the folks know what it is for."

"Oh! dear, yes, Sir," said the park-keeper, "that is easily

done," and leading the way down, he had soon introduced his companion to the old housekeeper, and the three walked over every room of the hall together.

Here and there Mr. Morton stopped and examined everything closely. He looked at the old pictures of the Mallington family. He gazed round the deserted drawing-room with feelings which every one must have known when standing where gay multitudes of happy hearts, long cold, have once tasted the bright hours of life; but he paused long in the library, took down several books and examined them, seeming especially interested in a manuscript volume, which bore upon its back "History of the Mallington Family."

While he was thus employed the housekeeper and Edmonds stood at the window and looked out. Some of their observations caught the gentleman's ear, and he suddenly turned round, when through the casement he perceived a young man in a shooting jacket crossing the park at a couple of hundred yards' distance. He was a tall, powerful, handsome youth, and Mr. Morton inquired "Who is that?"

"Why that is Mr. Alfred Latimer, Sir," answered the park-keeper, "the son of Mrs. Charlton, on the hill. It 's a pity he goes on so, for I do not think he is so bad at heart after all; and he has always been very kind and civil to me ever since I looked over his shooting a pheasant or two when he was a boy."

"Ah! he is a bad one," said the old housekeeper; "you always took his part, Edmonds, but he is a bad one, and you 'll find that out some day. — Would you like to look at the kitchens, Sir?"

"No, I thank you," replied Morton; "now, Mr. Edmonds, I will go;" and walking out with his guide he took leave of him, adding, ere they parted, "I could wish the house taken better care of. They seem to have been cutting off the leaden pipes at the corners."

"Ay, that was done by a pack of blackguards last winter," answered Edmonds.

"They will commit further depredations if they be not checked," replied Morton. "I wish we could have the place better protected,

for I am likely to take it just as it stands; but we will think of that hereafter. — Good day."

CHAPTER X.

INSTEAD of turning his steps to his own house, Edmonds, the head park-keeper, who had in former days not only acted in that capacity but as head game-keeper also, and had, moreover, superintended the arrangement of the gardens — for he was a sort of Gilpin in low life — stood upon the terrace before the house for some minutes, as if he were enjoying the beauties of the prospect. The housekeeper, too, remained at the door without closing it, looking after Mr. Morton as he walked away. Now, it is a very difficult thing to be looked at as one walks away, gracefully. If we are conscious that people are staring at our backs the slightest portion of vanity in the world will lift us up on our toes with a spring; the slightest portion of pride will make our shoulders as stiff as a board; the slightest portion of *mauvaise honte* will make us bend our heads, and walk awkwardly for fear of swaggering. But Morton, whether he was unaware that any one was gazing after him, or whether he was neither vain, proud, nor bashful, went on with quiet ease; and Mrs. Chalke, the housekeeper, admired his back very much.

"That's a gentleman, whoever he is, Edmonds," she said at length, after having passed about two minutes in contemplation.

Edmonds started and turned round; but he agreed heartily in her commendation, saying "Yes, that he is, indeed, Mrs. Chalke; we seldom see such a one in these parts."

"I wonder who he is," rejoined the old lady; "do you know, Edmonds?"

"No, that I don't," answered the park-keeper. "Now I think of it, I did not even recollect to ask his name. But Dr. Western knows, Mrs. Chalke; for he talked a good deal about the rector, and said he was an excellent man."

"And so he is," replied the good old lady, "but" — and the old lady went on to communicate to Edmonds all her fears and apprehensions regarding her stay at Mallington Hall with none but

one housemaid, whom she was obliged to keep herself. "I declare," she said, "that, whatever comes of it, I won't stay another winter here in this way. I am sure I was well nigh frightened out of my life last winter; and if the people who cut off the pipes and tried to find a way in at the back door had known that there was such a quantity of plate in the house they would have broken in to a certainty; that they would. But they all think that my lord took the plate to London with him the last time he was down, and so he did take the plateau, and the two great soup tureens, and one set of dishes; but nevertheless there 's enough here in the plate room, to tempt those vagabonds down at the Clove Tree, and if they were to find it out I should be a dead woman."

"Well, before the long nights come," said Edmonds, "I will think what can be done, and if we can't manage better I will come up here and sleep myself. But I must go away now, Mrs. Chalke, for I want to speak with Blackmore about the garden. Something must be done to get it in order, that 's clear. Why, it 's quite a wilderness."

"Ay, that it is," answered Mrs. Chalke, "but who is to pay for doing it, Edmonds?"

"Why, I don't know," answered Edmonds, "but I dare say some one will, if it 's done. Whoever the place comes to ought. Good day, Mrs. Chalke," and he walked away.

Taking his way through the park towards the gate which, as the old lady at the lodge had said, always stood open, he went leisurely on, meditating with no little satisfaction upon the events of the morning. He had by this time become reconciled to the idea of Mallington Park going out of the family, and visions of a thousand pleasant changes, under the auspices of Mr. Morton, presented themselves to his imagination by the way. When he was about two-thirds through the park, he caught a glimpse of the very man he was thinking of, seated at the foot of a tree, employed with his paper and pencil in sketching the bridge, which was just seen spanning the river through an opening in the trees, with the village of Mallington well massed against the hill rising up beyond. Edmonds paused to look at him for a moment; but, though he was

within two or three hundred yards, he did not think fit to approach, notwithstanding several questions which had suggested themselves to his mind, and which he much wished to put to his new acquaintance.

"He takes a mighty delight in the place, surely," said the park-keeper to himself; "I should like to be able to draw in that way. It would be so nice to have the house all hung with pictures of the park. Why, there 's Mr. Latimer coming up to him. I hope he won't be saucy, for he 's just as likely to say an uncivil thing as a civil one — no, he seems to be polite enough. He 's talking to him about his drawing, I dare say. Ay, there now, he 's looking at it," and a moment after Morton rose, put the sketch-book in his pocket, and walked away with Alfred Latimer, at an easy and sauntering pace. In the meanwhile the park-keeper pursued his way, passed through the gate, and, following the road which ran from the bridge, along the stream under the park wall, reached, at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, a small cottage built upon the bank of the river, with a little garden round it, occupying the whole space between the highway and the water. It was neatly and beautifully kept, for Blackmore, the gardener, after quitting the service of Mr. Charlton, many years before, under circumstances which the reader may recollect, had soon found another place; but at the end of two years had fallen from a tree and broken his thigh, which threw him for many months out of employment. He had then, nearly crippled by the accident, devoted himself to the cultivation of this little piece of ground, and made a scanty livelihood by selling the produce at Mallington. He always found a ready market, indeed, for what he could produce, for he was the most scientific gardener in the neighbourhood, but still his means were too limited to allow of any great sale, and to keep the wolf from the door was all that he could accomplish. Another great misfortune had befallen him. His son had proved wild, intractable, and idle; and the abilities which had once made his father's heart glad, had, by inducing an overweening self-conceit, proved a bane instead of a blessing. At almost any hour of the day, from sunrise to sunset, Blackmore was to be met with in his garden, and there Edmonds now found

him labouring away, in his ordinary working dress, with a sad and thoughtful countenance.

"Well, Blackmore," said the park-keeper, after the usual country salutations, "I think I have got some good news for you."

"Indeed!" said Blackmore, looking up. "I shall be very glad to hear them, Mr. Edmonds, for I have got some bad news for you, and for every one else in the neighbourhood."

"Ay! what is that?" demanded Edmonds. "I was in hopes it was going to turn out a lucky day."

"There 's but little luck for me, any how," answered Blackmore; "but my news is that Master Alfred has come back again."

"Pooh! is that all?" exclaimed the park-keeper. "You are too harsh with that lad, Blackmore. He 's not a bad youth at bottom. His mother has spoilt him, that 's all. He will soon sow his wild oats, and turn out better than you think."

"He 's a bad-hearted young villain," answered Blackmore sternly. "He was bad as a boy, is bad as a youth, and will be bad as a man. There 's no good in him, Mr. Edmonds. He 's as vain and conceited as he 's vicious and violent, and that 's what makes him like to associate with people below himself; because people of his own station in life won't let him lead or bully, or have all his own way. It is because he wishes to be flattered and made a miracle of, and be cock of the walk that makes him keep company with such folks as my son and Billy Maltby, and others like them. I could forgive and forget all that he did when he was a boy, and all that his mother did too, but I can't forgive his having corrupted my lad John, and made a drunken, idle vagabond of him."

"Well, perhaps, he will behave better now," said Edmonds. "He has been away for five months, and may have improved."

"Improved!" said Blackmore, in a sullen tone. "He 'll never improve. What was the first thing he did when he came back? Why, instead of going to his mother's house, like any other gentleman, he went down to the Clove Tree, and there he sat drinking and playing dice till two o'clock this morning, so my good woman tells me. Poor thing! he 's helped to break her heart, however, for our boy would never have gone on so if it had not been for

him; and there he sat winning money from one or two; but losing it preciously to Bill Maltby, and, I dare say, not very fairly either. Then he went back to the inn to sleep, but Mrs. Pluckrose had had the house shut up, and would not have her people let him in, so he was forced to go home, I suppose, though they say he swore at his mother like a graceless young villain, and damned her, I know not how many times, before the whole of the raff of the Clove Tree, because he said she had grown stingy, and would not give him enough to keep him like a gentleman, or pay his debts."

"That 's bad—that 's very bad!" said Edmonds. "However, Blackmore, there 's no use of talking about him; I shall give him a lecture when I see him, and he always listens quietly enough to what I say. What I have to tell you is, that I have got orders at last from some one, I don't know who — but as the money came with them, that 's all I have to care for— to put the park in order, and I dare say the garden is meant too. Now, as poor old Wilkinson, our head man, died of his cough last winter, I don't see why you shouldn't come up, and see to getting the garden to rights with any help you can have. Then, being on the spot, you know, you will have a chance of the place when whoever has the hall comes down."

Blackmore held out his hand to him with a glad smile, exclaiming, "Now that 's kind of you, Mr. Edmonds — that 's very kind of you, it 's just like you, and I 'll be very glad of the job, whether it goes on or not; for nothing is doing so well as it used to do, and that boy will be the ruin of me, as well as break my heart — that he has done well nigh already. Oh! Mr. Edmonds, if any one had told me of him that I was so proud of — when I used to think, because he could do anything almost that he turned his hand to, and was more like a gentleman's son than a gardener's, that he might one day be a great man and make his fortune — if any one had told me that he would one day be an idle, worthless vagabond, I would have little believed it."

"We should never try to make our children gentlemen, Blackmore," said the park-keeper. "It 's a great mistake. It 's only grafting a twig on a stock that won't bear it. If there 's anything really above the mark in them, it will come out without our help."

"Ah! it was all that Alfred Latimer," said the poor gardener; "he ruined him. When first he used to take the boy out rabbit shooting on the common, I used not to like it; but I little thought what it would come to. I remember well enough when he and I had the quarrel about the melon beds up at Mallington House, and I took him in by the arm, and his mother took his part — though the good old gentleman took mine, and found him out in all his lies — he said he would be revenged some day — and revenged he has been, indeed; but here comes John and Bill Maltby, I shan't say much to him, for if I do I may say more than I intend;" and once more shaking the park-keeper by the hand, he walked into the house.

"I 'll say something to the young scamp, however," said Edmonds to himself as the gardener retreated; and, waiting calmly at the little wicket of the garden, he watched John Blackmore and his companion sauntering leisurely up with a grave fixed look that neither of them seemed particularly to like.

The first was a young man of about nineteen, with an air of vulgar finery about him, which was anything but prepossessing. He wore his light whiskers long and curling, with a good deal of shirt collar, not very clean, and round his neck a blue satin handkerchief fastened in front with a coarse paste pin. His waistcoat was of divers colours, and displayed to the best advantage a gilt guard chain, not very new. His trousers were loose and somewhat too long for their wearer, draggled and dirty about the heels; and his coat, in the extreme of a past fashion, was of a colour too light not to display more signs of age than were even afforded by the antiquity of the cut.

The other man was of a very different aspect. He was perhaps, two or three and twenty years of age, strongly built, though spare, broad in the shoulders, thin in the flanks, long in the limbs. His head was small and round as a ball, his hair cut short, but the portion which was wanting on the cranium, was made up by the superabundance upon the cheek and under the chin, where the whole exuberant growth was amply displayed by the turning down of the shirt collar over a thin black neckerchief, loosely tied round the neck. His features were small and generally well cut,

the nose somewhat too short, and the underlip too thick. The quick, keen, gray eyes, under an overhanging brow, were bright and clear, and the chin prominent but well rounded. His air was free and bold; and there was a look of decision and indifferent impudence about his whole aspect, which was only contradicted by the sharp and inquisitive glance of the eye that seemed to mark everything it fell upon, as if with a consciousness of danger. His dress was plainer than that of his companion, but yet fresher, and of a more suitable character, consisting of a round jacket of dark cloth, a light coloured waistcoat buttoned only in one hole, a pair of gray trousers, very white stockings, and shoes cut low in the quarter like those generally worn by sailors. Indeed, his whole appearance had somewhat of a nautical air, and he only wanted the corkscrew curls of hair on each cheek, and the peculiar walk, to pass at first sight for a seaman well to do in life.

Edmonds, as I have said, eyed them sternly as they came forward, and his fixed gaze was not pleasant to either party; but the younger of the two felt it most, and he looked down upon the ground while the other returned the stare unabashed, though he whispered a word to his companion with a smile curling his lip, as if in contempt of the good park-keeper.

The latter, however, was not a man to be checked by either looks or speeches in any course he might think fit to pursue, and his eye never winked after it had once settled upon John Blackmore and his companion, and when they came near he said at once "Well, John, the same courses I find — what will come of it, think you?"

"What should come of it, Mr. Edmonds?" asked the youth.

"Dishonesty, beggary, wickedness, and the gallows, I should think," replied Edmonds. "Here you are emptying your poor father's pockets, breaking his heart, and ruining him with your extravagance and folly; and wasting your time, losing your character — if ever you had any — and ruining yourself body and soul with a pack of scamps and vagabonds, who first make a fool of you and then laugh at you, and will very soon kick you off to thieve, beg, or die on a dunghill."

"I mind my own affairs, Mr. Edmonds," answered John Blackmore; "and you had better mind yours, too."

"What is that, master keeper, you said about scamps and vagabonds?" demanded Billy Maltby, walking a step or two closer to Edmonds, with a look of cold daring.

"I said," replied the keeper, without moving an inch, "that he keeps company with nothing but such."

"Then you mean me amongst the rest," said Maltby, in the same tone.

"At the head of them," replied Edmonds.

"Then take that for your pains!" exclaimed the other, aiming an overhand blow at his head.

But if he was strong and scientific in the noble science of the ring, the park-keeper was stronger and no less skilful; and, instantly parrying the blow with his left hand, he returned it with the right, striking his opponent so hard on the eye, that the surrounding bone seemed to crack under the stroke, and in an instant he was lying on his back on the road. He was up in a second, however, and springing at his opponent with fury, was knocked down again before he could plant a blow. Old Blackmore rushed out of his house at the sound of contention; a stout fellow, who had been one of the under-keepers, ran up from a cottage hard by; and Maltby, with a furious oath, pulled off his coat, called for a ring, and challenged Edmonds to fight it out on the spot. The park-keeper hesitated for an instant, for the bull-dog spirit of John Bull was strong within him; but, after a brief consideration, he said, "No, I won't — I 'm a father of a family, my lad, and have given over such tricks; but I 'll tell you what I will do: If ever you are saucy to me again, or if ever I find you lurking about the park or in the covers, I will give you such a hiding as will save some one a deal of trouble; so take care of yourself, that 's all; for you 've had a taste, and only a taste; but you shall have as much as you can carry the next time. Come along with me, Wilson, I 've something to say to you," and he walked away with the under-keeper, turning a deaf ear to the taunts and insults which Billy Maltby judged it expedient to pour upon him.

CHAPTER XI.

I MUST now beg the reader to put on his hat — for it is yet the early morning, and walking under forest trees before the dew has risen with an uncovered head is not sane — and to step back with me to the spot where Mr. Edward Morton sat under a tree — it was an imprudent proceeding — sketching the bridge. I wonder how he could be so silly; but poets and painters and sportsmen are always very foolish, and are as fond of "brushing the morning dew," as they call it, as a deer, forgetting that their shoes are not horny ones of nature's providing, but of very penetrable leather. However, there he sat sketching, till, turning his eyes a little to the right, in the direction where the keeper's house lay in its little glen, hidden by the trees, he beheld Alfred Latimer coming, with a quick and hurried pace, towards the spot where he had placed himself.

Now, like many other men who have an overweening opinion of their own merits, Alfred Latimer was shy of people at all in his own station of life. His class is a very common one, where pride and vanity are mingled together in such portions as to exacerbate each other, and where the opinion of our own merits is not of that calm and comfortable kind which renders us perfectly sure that every man of sense will esteem and appreciate us as we do ourselves; but, on the contrary, is of the irritable and suspicious kind, which leads us to fear that our qualities will not be so readily recognized as we think they ought to be, and consequently to seek such society alone as will receive any adventitious circumstances of rank or wealth as sure claims to admiration and respect. He would not have thought of speaking to Mr. Morton first for the world; that gentleman's dress and appearance, and the high-bred air about him would have been an impassable barrier against such a proceeding. But Morton himself had his own views and purposes; and as he saw the widow's son walking on with a shy glance towards him, he first beckoned to him; and, as Alfred Latimer did not choose to see the sign, he raised his voice and called, taking care not to rise.

"May I speak with you for a moment," he said; and the young gentleman, with a quick, but unwilling step, approached.

"Pray, can you tell me," continued Morton, pointing with his pencil to a spot in the distance, where, following the course of the valley, the eye rested on a tower which seemed that of a church, and then to his sketch, where the same object was represented in a few bold light strokes. "Pray, can you tell me what is the name of that place?" and he added, with an accurate, yet seemingly careless hand, several strokes to the drawing.

"That is called Steeple Melford," replied the young man, looking over his shoulder, and set at once at ease by the familiarity of the stranger.

"Is it a town or a village?" asked Morton, going on.

"Oh, nothing but a little village," replied Latimer, still looking at his progress. "How quick you draw."

"Habit, habit!" answered Morton; "but I think that will do," and he rose.

"Why you do not call that finished, do you?" demanded the young gentleman; "you will never be able to make anything out of that."

"Oh, yes," replied Morton, "as you will see, if you call upon me in a day or two at the inn. It is all I want; and so now I will go back again. You reside here, I think."

As he spoke he took a step forward, and Alfred Latimer followed him, while replying "Yes, I generally do. My mother has a house at the top of the hill there, and when we are good friends I live with her — when we are not I go away."

"Why you never quarrel with your mother, do you?" said Morton, in a good-humoured tone. "That 's a bad plan."

"No, we don't exactly quarrel," answered Alfred Latimer; "but sometimes she does not choose to give me money enough, and then I go away, and that is sure to bring her round."

"But, perhaps, she cannot afford to give it to you," said Morton; "she may not have it to give."

"That is what she says," replied the other, "but it is all an excuse. Why, the old man left her very well off, and the guardians allow my sister Louisa twelve hundred a-year, and the

whole of that, except two hundred that she keeps for her dress, goes to my mother for the house, so that she could let me have more if she liked, I am sure."

"Perhaps not," rejoined Morton thoughtfully. "We young men do not always calculate very accurately what our parents can afford. I recollect when I was your age thinking it very hard to have no more than two hundred a-year allowed me at college; but I have found out since that it was all my father could then afford to allow me, and more than was convenient. I know your mother, and her establishment is expensive."

"Ay, why does she keep up such a one?" said Alfred Latimer. "It is upon that and her dress that the money goes. But she won't be without anything that she has a mind to have, and yet grumbles when I want a few pounds. Here, she has had two or three dinner parties this last week, and pic-nics, and all sort of things, they tell me, and yet when I wrote to her to send me fifty pounds, she vowed she had not got as much in the world, and sent me ten."

"But in that case why don't you apply to some other relation or friend?" inquired his companion. "If the money is absolutely necessary to you to pay a bill, or anything of that kind, I dare say you could easily borrow it."

"Necessary enough, by Jove!" cried young Latimer, "for a fellow in London to whom I owe a small sum threatens to arrest me, so I was obliged to make myself scarce, as they call it; and, as to borrowing the money, I know no one who has got it to lend. Louisa would let me have it soon enough if she had it; but she sent me all her last quarter, except ten pounds, six weeks ago, and she will not have any more till the 29th of September, for those old screws, her guardians, are as hard as flint. None of my friends have a *sous* to bless themselves with, and my relations — a set of proud blackguards — take no notice of me because my father chose to marry against their consent — devil fly away with them!"

"You would find it a good plan, Mr. Latimer," said Morton, "to make friends amongst people who can give you assistance in whatever way you may want it; and there are many sorts of assist-

ance much more important and valuable than such a trifle as forty or fifty pounds."

"Ah! I understand what you mean," answered Latimer, "to make acquaintance with fashionable people; but they are all so d—d stupid. They are as cold and dull as lead, and up to no fun; and I doubt much whether they would think forty or fifty pounds such a trifle as you fancy, for they are stingy enough, I can tell you."

"I have not found them so," replied Morton, "and for my own part I am always willing to lend a friend what he wants, as far as my means go, and so," he continued, pulling open the iron gate of the park, and going out first, "if your mother cannot let you have the fifty pounds you want, I will; for she has been very kind and courteous to me since I have been here; and I should like to make her any return, by assisting her son."

"Upon my life, you are an excellent fellow!" cried Alfred Latimer, who had not the slightest hesitation in regard to borrowing money wherever he could get it. "I will pay you as soon as I can; for I have my own annuity, and in the meantime I will give you my I O U."

Morton smiled, but made no reply, for his young companion's words showed that he was not altogether unaccustomed to the trade of borrowing, and confirmed him in the belief which he had entertained from the first, that the money he was about to lend would never be repaid; and yet, strange to say, he was even, perhaps, the more willing to lend it on that account. "If I can obtain a hold upon this youth," he thought, "and by the loss of a few pounds, lent him from time to time, render him in some degree bound to me by necessity, if not by gratitude, I may, perhaps, disentangle him from his low and vicious companions, and gradually lead him at all events into a better way of life, if not into higher and nobler thoughts. It is at all events worth the while."

Who was he thinking of when he indulged in these meditations? I suspect, dear reader, that once more Louisa Charlton had something to do with the matter; for certainly Alfred Latimer had not greatly prepossessed him in his favour; and it was hardly to be expected, however Quixotic might be his benevolence, that

he should be thus studious to reclaim a dissolute youth upon the pure principles of abstract benevolence.

However that might be, he walked on, talking with his young companion, over the bridge into the little inn and up to his own rooms, where, taking the I O U which the other offered, he gave him ten five pound notes, much to Latimer's satisfaction. The borrower was quite ready to leave the lender the moment he had got the money; but Morton detained him for nearly an hour, showing him a portfolio of drawings, and engaging him to talk of various subjects, which, as his heart was opened by what he internally called "his piece of marvellous good luck," he was willing enough to do. On most points he displayed very gross ignorance; for though he had acquired a certain knowledge of Latin and Greek, a smattering of French, and a few other accomplishments, all the more valuable part of education was wanting. Like so many others, he had acquired words rather than ideas — forms rather than substance; he spoke without understanding — argued, but did not reason — and had, in short, been instructed, but not educated. Nevertheless, Morton gained one object which he had in view: he obtained, even by his short conference, a great, even an extraordinary influence over Alfred Latimer's mind. There was something in his conversation which entertained and amused the young man, and yet, whether he would or not, commanded his respect. It was light and cheerful, easy and flowing, but not too familiar; and, at the same time, there flowed through it an under-current of strong good sense and high-toned feeling, which never obtruded, but, always apparent, had its effect with gentle and persuasive influence, which sent the youth away thoughtful and inquiring. He felt, for the first time, perhaps, that there were other things in life than those he had lived for, and things also that were worth seeking; but, alas! the education from infancy to manhood, if education it could be called, had been given; the tree had received its bent, and it was never to be changed again, though it might be blown about by any strong blast that passed over it.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE was a large dinner party at Mallington House, and the drawing-room was in the usual state in which drawing-rooms are when all the expected company have arrived and yet dinner has not been announced. It is a period of long pauses, and of gentlemen slowly crossing the room to say three words to ladies at the other side; and of sundry other inventions for making Time run lightly when he is heavy afoot, and of contrivances for not seeming stupid when one is anything but vivacious. It is a period when conversation, properly so called, is impossible. One may talk, one may speak treason, make love, or offer marriage, or any other of those things which people generally do in private places; but it is impossible to converse when one is in expectation of being interrupted the next minute. There was in the room a great variety of the human animal; Mrs. Charlton, now certainly growing the "stout lady," but still not ungraceful; Louisa Charlton, looking as lovely as one of those gleams of happiness which sometimes come across a monotonous existence, like a sudden burst of sunshine on a chill hill side, could render her fair face; a fox-hunting country baronet, a portly man, as fat in his ideas as in his person; his wife, a very fine lady indeed, and all the finer because she had not always been a fine lady; their daughter, who was what people usually call a sweet interesting girl — I can describe her no better, for although this book is written for posterity, and it is very probable that posterity (if society improves) may not define a sweet interesting girl exactly as we should at present, yet will there not be dictionaries of the dead tongue of the nineteenth century? Besides these persons, there were in the room a country gentleman, who hunted foxes during the autumn and spring, and found the rest of the year very heavy; his two sons, who trod in their father's horse's steps, and both of whom intended some day to marry Miss Charlton. There was, moreover, a widow lady of mature years, with her niece, Dr. Western, Mr. Morton, and Alfred Latimer.

Mrs. Charlton had evidently not calculated upon her son's ap-

pearance when she invited the rest of the company, for the persons present, including herself, formed the ominous number of thirteen. Indeed, the movements of the worthy youth were not always easy to calculate upon; and it seemed as if he sometimes did violence to his own tastes and propensities, especially for the purpose of preventing people from knowing what he would do next. Now, for the last two years, nothing had been sufficient to prevail upon him to be present at anything like a formal dinner party in Mallington House. It was an annoyance to him; it was a restraint. His character, half shy half haughty, scorned and hated the ceremonies and courtesies of life; but on this occasion, as soon as his mother informed him that such a meeting was to take place, he announced his intention of being present, and was one of the first in the room. As soon as the guests began to arrive he seated himself by Louisa, and talked to her for some time in a low tone. Mrs. Charlton watched them as much as circumstances would allow, with an eye glanced towards her son between every sentence and every movement; and she saw her fair step-daughter colour deeply at something he said, and the moment after perceived a warm smile come upon Louisa's beautiful lip. The next instant the fox-hunter and his two sons were ushered in; and the graceful mistress of the mansion advanced a step or two to meet the thin wind-cutting elderly man, who came forward with no slight idea of his own importance, and to welcome his two family jewels. As she passed she heard Louisa say, in a low voice, "For pity's sake, Alfred, defend me from either or both of them. I think they are the two most unpleasant young men in the whole county."

"What wretches they must be, then!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer, laughing aloud; "but I will defend you, Louisa," and the moment the elder of the youths approached to pay his respects to Miss Charlton, her step-brother addressed him in a jeering tone, but not without a touch of pride in his manner, saying "So, Mr. Middleton, you broke your fine horse's back, last March, I hear."

"He broke his own back and nearly my neck," replied the young gentleman somewhat nettled.

"Ay, but it was all your own fault," answered Alfred Latimer;

"If you had not pulled him in when you found yourself at the top of the bank he would have gone down as easy as if he had been treading on a Turkey carpet; but he was resolved to go, and you were afraid to let him, and so between you he was killed and you half killed."

Louisa Charlton felt somewhat painfully that it is at times a dangerous thing to trust one's defence to a person on whom we cannot depend. She was mortified at her companion's rudeness, and though she reaped the benefit by Mr. Middleton's speedy withdrawal from a conversation so disagreeable to him, yet she could not refrain from saying a few kind and courteous words to medicate the wounds which she had been unwillingly art and part in inflicting on his own particular vanity.

"Well, Louisa, you are an odd girl!" said Alfred Latimer, as the guest moved away. "Here you declare you wish to be rid of him, and when I send him away you say all in your power to make him stay — but here comes the other brother, Edward, and there comes Mr. Morton in at the door. On my life, I have a great mind to deliver you over to Ned Middleton, and exclude the favourite."

Louisa Charlton was silent, but by no effort that she could command was she able to prevent the warm blood from once more mounting into her cheek at his words, any more than the peach or the nectarine can command its sunny side not to blush under the sun's rays.

Morton and Edward Middleton advanced almost together, and Louisa observed that Mrs. Charlton whispered a few words to the former, which were merely "Will you have the kindness, when we go to dinner, to take Louisa?" which would have puzzled her more if she had known their import than the mere appearance of a little private communication did in the abstract. He bowed his head, with a well-pleased smile, and as the young and inexperienced but clear-minded girl, by a mere casual glance, withdrawn as soon as given, marked his carriage as he crossed the room towards her, she could not help comparing his whole appearance and demeanour with those around, and singling out the gentleman — that rare and excellent thing — the gentleman by feeling

and by habit, by nature as well as education, by heart as well as by position, from those who conventionally took the title, but did not possess the character.

Alfred Latimer was in one of his happy moods. His conversation with Morton in the morning, and the relief which he had received from the embarrassment which seemed most pressing at the time, had raised his spirits and had given him confidence in himself; and not really wanting in talent, though totally wanting in discretion, principle, and self-command, he proceeded to play that part which he thought would be most pleasing to his new friend and to his mother's step-daughter, with more skill than might have been expected. It is true that he took a pleasure in annoying the neighbouring gentry, who, to say the truth, possessed but little to command his respect, and who had done nothing to conciliate his regard. He had no reverence for anything or any person, though it may seem a strange assertion to make of one who generally excluded himself from society simply out of shyness. But shyness never proceeds from reverence for others; it is quite a different thing from timidity; and the object of its consideration is the estimation in which we shall be held by others, not the estimation in which others ought to be held by us.

He kept his seat, then, by the side of Louisa Charlton till Morton advanced and shook hands with her in silence, while Mr. Edward Middleton was saying something he thought very fine. Then rising and leaving his place vacant, he drew the young fox-hunter aside, and inquired after his black pointer bitch, adding with a laugh, "You had better let me have her; for you do not know how to hunt her."

While he communicated this pleasant sentiment to his acquaintance, Morton took the chair he had left vacant, and Louisa gazed in his face earnestly for a moment, while he said a few words upon indifferent subjects, as if there was something of more importance on which she would fain have spoken. She answered somewhat at random, too; and Morton with easy self-possession, which is only acquired by much mingling in the world, took advantage of the first of those little bustles which do enliven occasionally the

dull ten minutes to give her the opportunity of saying anything she might think fit.

"You seem as if you had a tale to tell, Miss Charlton," he said, as Dr. Western and several others moved away to look at some fine drawings to which Mrs. Charlton called their attention.

"No, indeed," answered Louisa, with a warm smile; "but I have heard a tale which would be very gratifying to me if I had not a warning to give. Mr. Latimer, who is my half brother, you know — at least Mrs. Charlton's son — has told me your great kindness to him this morning; but — but, Mr. Morton — I do not really know how to explain myself" —

Morton gazed into her beautiful eyes for a moment with a smile, till he saw the colour in her cheek begin to grow a little deeper, and then he said "Will you let me help you, Miss Charlton?"

"I am afraid you cannot," replied Louisa, "and yet I think it but right to say that which — which" —

"Well, let me try," rejoined Morton; "You know not yet how much of the seer I am; or, in other words, how much insight one honest heart has into another, and how quickly a man of the world perceives the circumstances of those with whom he mingles. You would warn me, then, my dear Miss Charlton, that the money will never be repaid."

"No, no," said Louisa; "not exactly that; for that I could insure myself, but I merely wished to hint that Alfred might trespass upon your kindness too far, and inconsiderately borrow more than he could ever repay. He is already much in debt, I am sorry to find; and I feared that you might be a loser, perhaps, of more than" —

Once more she paused, and Morton finished the sentence for her, saying "More than I can afford. You will think me a strange personage, Miss Charlton, when I tell you that I lent this money with the full knowledge, or at least belief, that it would never be repaid; and I should be quite ready to lend a much larger sum, with the same conviction, for the same object."

"Nay, why should you do that?" exclaimed Louisa Charlton.

The servant almost at the same instant announced that dinner was on the table, and Morton merely replied in a low voice, "Do

you not think I would do much more to save from perdition a person nearly connected with one I love?"

Louisa's hand trembled as she took the arm which Morton offered, and her steps tottered as he led her towards the door. All the three Misters Middleton looked surprised and offended at the young stranger taking such bold possession of the heiress, and the father asked his eldest son, "Who the devil is that fellow?"

"Some painter, they say," replied the heir apparent, with a shrug of the shoulders; and he walked forward to give his arm to the baronet's daughter, the sweet interesting girl, while his father advanced to escort the baronet's wife.

Poor Louisa Charlton! going down those stairs was a sad agitating journey to her. At the first step her head whirled, and her thoughts were all in confusion; at the second, her heart beat so vehemently she thought she must have dropped; at the third, she asked herself if her ears had not deceived her; at the fourth, though she was quite certain Morton had spoken those words, she felt sure that she had mistaken their import; at the fifth, she recollected that Alfred Latimer was nearly connected with many persons whom she did not know, and that Edmond Morton might very likely love one of them; at the sixth, she had quite settled the matter to her own satisfaction, and though she did not believe one word of the hypothesis she had set up, and did believe that Morton loved her a little, and would have been very sorry to have believed that he loved any one else more, yet, as it suited her purpose, and calmed her agitation to fancy that she had mistaken him, she persuaded herself that it was so. How continually we lie to our own heart. Here below, each individual has some eight or ten millions of persons to deal with — more or less directly — and by the best statistical tables of lying it may be calculated that, at least, one half of those eight or ten millions are trying to cheat him to the best of their ability; but the aggregate amount of lying practised on him by all the men that he knows or has to do with, is very inferior to that which he practises on himself.

By this art Louisa Charlton made herself quite comfortable for the time, and the last steps of the stairs were passed calmly and quietly. She had even recovered herself so far ere they reached the

dining-room door as to say, "You are very kind; but I fear Alfred is more deeply plunged in debts and difficulties than you think."

"Perhaps they may be made a means," answered Morton "of rescuing him from worse evils. I will try to explain how during dinner, if I have an opportunity."

The meal passed over as such things usually do. The appearance of the crops was discussed. Some of the cases at quarter sessions were talked of. There had been an earthquake about that time in the West Indies, and a pig had been born in a neighbouring parish with two heads. Both proved very serviceable on the present occasion; but while the pig was upon the carpet, Morton found the moment that he was looking for, and explained to Louisa Charlton his views and his plans in regard to Alfred Latimer. He showed her that the most fatal vice which can affect a young man of good station, the love of low society had taken possession of Mrs. Charlton's son; and he went on to express a hope that if by rendering him pecuniary assistance, and thus forcing him frequently to associate with himself, he could obtain some influence over his mind, he might either lead him without discussion, or persuade him by reason, to abandon his low associates, and seek the company of men in his own station. He was compelled to be very brief in what he said; but everything was clear and definite, just and reasonable; with a sufficient portion of enthusiasm, subdued and studiously kept out of sight, as far as it could be, to excite admiration and regard in his fair hearer, and with sufficient tenderness of tone and manner to make her heart beat a very little, but not to agitate her enough to be at all unpleasant. Morton had been very wrong, indeed, in making his declaration of love at the door of the drawing-room; but he managed the succeeding operations better, and Louisa went away from the table thoughtful and happy; and with the fate of her young heart fixed.

The private tone in which Mr. Morton and Miss Charlton had been speaking during dinner, had not escaped observation, and some of the younger gentlemen at the table, who would have preferred enjoying the same degree of intimacy themselves, were rather inclined to be impertinent to the supposed painter. The baronet himself, and the elder Mr. Middleton, treated him coldly

and proudly — condescended to address a few words to him, indeed, but affected to confine them entirely to the subject of the arts. Morton was exceedingly amused, and humoured them to the top of their bent; for he had heard the report of his supposed profession, and had done his best to encourage it, taking at least a dozen more sketches than he would have otherwise done, and that in a very ostentatious manner.

Good Doctor Western, however, was destined to spoil his sport, with the gentlemen present at least; for the worthy gentleman could not make up his mind to say or imply what was untrue, even for a jest; and when Sir Simon Upplestone asked him directly who and what Mr. Morton was, adding, "People say, doctor, that he is merely a poor artist; now you know, doctor —" the rector interrupted him, for fear he should say something more disagreeable still, replying, "He is a gentleman, Sir, in every respect, by birth, education, and fortune; though he certainly deserves the name of an artist, as far as drawing better than many who make it their profession — can entitle him to that distinction.

Morton caught the sense of the doctor's reply, if not the exact words, and was vexed with him; and the evening, as he expected, passed very dully from that moment. Long before the guests departed, Alfred Latimer disappeared from the room; and Morton, who marked his going, entertained no doubt that he sought society more congenial to his tastes and habits.

CHAPTER XIII.

Louisa Charlton slept little during the night after the dinner party which we have just spoken of. While conversation was going on around her, and lights dazzled her eyes, and the siren songs of her step-mother who had not yet lost one note of her sweet voice, rang in her ears, and Morton was by her side, the delusion which she practised on herself lasted with sufficient power to prevent her from examining closely the realities which she hesitated to contemplate. Let it not be supposed that she really believed that what she thought fit to fancy for the time, was true. Oh, no! As I have before said, she knew at the bottom of her heart that it

was not so; but do we not sit in the box of a theatre, and see men, whom we have often beheld in homely apparel, now tricked out in gold and velvet, enacting kings and princes, with scenes around them representing forests and palaces, tented fields, and royal courts; and though we know the men and women to be very humble folks, often denied by the senseless usages of the proud cold world the very respect which genius of any kind should always command, and though we are well aware that the glittering pageantry in which they move is but thin lath and painted pasteboard, yet we find no difficulty in shutting out the undoubted truth from our own consideration, and see and hear and know nothing but what we are inclined to believe—till we have left the theatre, and reflect calmly over all that we have beheld. Thus Louisa Charlton would not know what she knew — would not believe what she actually believed — would not (contrary to all her usual habits), look the truth in the face. But as soon as she was alone and in silence, and the curtain of darkness drawn around, the communing with her own heart began. First, what was it that Edmond Morton really meant? She could no longer deceive herself — she was loved! It was not alone the few words he had spoken before dinner, but many others — not so plain, but plain enough — which he had spoken before. It was not alone words either, but looks and tone and manner. She could not doubt it — she did not doubt it; and turning her face to her pillow with a glowing cheek, she asked herself if she did not love in return? Oh! what a tumult then was felt in her young breast; how confused and wild seemed all her thoughts! Mind would not answer what the heart spoke clearly enough; and for many minutes she dared not admit even to herself how deeply, how wholly, how warmly she returned the affection of one whom she had not known a month. The truth, however, made itself heard at length; but then she blamed herself that it was so. There seemed something to her eyes rash, imprudent, almost wrong, in yielding to such sensations; for she knew not that they are not dependant upon will, but are gifts — ay, bright and excellent gifts from God who made us — to be regulated, not to be resisted—to guide us to happiness, if wisely exercised. The truth, however, on this score also made itself felt ere long, and

when she thought of him she loved — of how different he was from every one she had previously seen — how high, yet gentle in his bearing — how noble and generous in his words and thoughts — how graceful in person and in manner — how perfect in all the qualities which win attachment and insure respect — she almost ceased to blame herself for loving, and loving hastily.

But then came the thought that he had never yet plainly spoken his attachment to her; he had but implied that he loved — he had not said it — and, for an instant, wild fears took possession of her. She had heard that men can trifle with woman's affection. She remembered the boy and the butterfly; and the very thought of all she felt being repaid by, perhaps, desertion and ingratitude was so terrible that she sobbed as if that sad fate had already befallen her. But then, when she remembered Edmond Morton's words on many occasions, when she thought of little traits which she had marked, and which speak the heart more than professions or set speeches, she was angry at herself for doubting him. Yet, notwithstanding that confidence in his honour, in his kindness, in his generous heart, she felt ashamed of having learned to love before her love had been distinctly asked — and that continued to trouble her through the night. Imagination — fertile in ways of tormenting, as well as in ways of blessing — filled her mind with a thousand other agitating thoughts, and kept her waking till the shrill drawing-room clock just beneath her bed-room struck three. She did not hear the next hour strike, but, some time after she started up as if in fear, and saw the morning light streaming through the shutters.

Looking at her watch she found it half-past five, and rising with a mind still troubled with the thought that even yet Edmond Morton had not justified her in feeling as she felt towards him, she dressed herself without ringing for her maid, resolved to walk down in the fresh early morning, and take breakfast with Dr. Western and Mrs. Evelyn. She thought that their society might comfort and calm her; not that she proposed for one moment to make them sharers of the thoughts that agitated her bosom; but there is something in the conversation of the good and wise which —like those excellent remedies physicians talk of that heal wounds

by giving tone and vigour to the whole constitution — soothe and medicate even the anxieties and sorrows which are not exposed to the eye. The good rector always breakfasted at an early hour, and Mrs. Charlton, on the contrary, always rose late, and frequently took her first meal in bed; so that Louisa was sure to find the family at the rectory up, and neither to be missed nor wanted at home. The morning was bright, though there were passing clouds, and she anticipated the walk through the fields at the back of the village with pleasure, for she was a child of the morning, and loved the early day. Her head ached a little, too, with a restless night, and she thought of the fresh air and the cool shade of the tall trees with eager longing; but she was obliged to wait for a time till some of the household were up, for she was dressed before half-past six. At length the sound of moving tables from below, and feet upon the stairs, told her that the housemaids at least were stirring, and, as her own habits were early, her maid soon after appeared. She was not surprised to find her young mistress up, and prepared to go out, for it had happened often before from other causes; and leaving word that she was gone down to Dr. Western's, Louisa issued forth, and walked quietly through the lanes and fields, pausing every now and then, with her cottage bonnet in her hand, to enjoy the morning breeze, and the prospect that opened here and there through the trees to the river and Mallington Park. But ever and anon, together with the sensation of enjoyment, came a certain undefined feeling of apprehension. Perhaps, it ought rather to be called anxiety; for it was not that she feared anything, but rather that she suddenly remembered, whenever she paused to taste the calm and unmingled pleasures which had been the brightness of her youth, that she loved; and that though she believed, though she was sure, that she was loved in return, yet the words had not been spoken that fully justified her in loving; and gradually she fell into a deeper fit of meditation, which led her to prolong her walk along the bank of the stream, knowing that Mrs. Evelyn would not be down before eight.

As she walked along, she met several workmen and country people returning to their cottages to breakfast; and from every

one, for they all knew her, she had a kind good morning, and a respectful — often a grateful bow. At length, as she came close upon the edge of the stream, choosing the green border of turf that separated it from the road, she saw a little fisherman, some nine or ten years old, casting his line into the water. The boy turned his warm face at her step, and recognising the son of Edmonds, the park-keeper, she gave him a smile and a nod, and was walking on. The boy, however, put his hand to his hat, half swinging round to bow to the young lady, when missing his footing, after a momentary struggle to save himself, he fell headlong into the stream. On the impulse of the moment, without pausing to consider how deep the river might be in that part, Louisa darted forward with a scream for help, and plunged in. She knew, indeed, that it was shallow above, but a mill-stream joined the little river a few yards higher up, and in a moment she felt the water circle over her head. Giddy and confused, with the green light flashing in her eyes, and the water rushing in her ears, she was rising again to the surface, when suddenly she felt a strong arm cast round her waist; and ere she well knew what had happened, was laid gently upon the grass.

"Oh, Louisa! Oh, my beloved girl!" cried the voice of Edmond Morton.

"The boy! the boy! the poor boy!" exclaimed Louisa, raising herself on her knees; and without further entreaty Morton plunged into the river again. But young Edmonds was in little danger comparatively. He knew something, though not much of swimming, and he held fast by his fishing-rod, showing both skill and presence of mind in so employing it as to keep his head above the water. With two strokes Morton reached him, and catching him under the shoulder, soon landed him in safety. The boy shook himself like a wet dog, and seemed in no degree the worse; but Louisa was pale as death, more, indeed, with fear than anything else. To her, Morton turned then, and, supporting her tenderly on his arm, he led her gently towards the rectory; but as they went he whispered words which were better calculated to restore the quick beating of Louisa's heart than any of all the excellent inventions of the Humane Society.

CHAPTER XIV.

Her heart beat — Oh, how it beat as he led her on! She could not answer a word, for if faintness and dizziness had not taken from her the power of speech, the overwhelming sensations which his words called forth would have left her voiceless. They were all joyful, it is true, and in anticipation she might have thought that such words as she now heard must be calming, tranquillizing, reassuring; and yet, while they made her very very happy, they showed her how much she had doubted, how much she had dreaded — they showed her, more than all, how much she loved. Even that was enough to agitate and overpower her, and for several minutes she seemed as it were in a dream. She could hardly believe that all which had occurred — nay, all which was occurring, was a reality. The drowning boy, the plunge into the stream, the waters closing over her head, the sudden and unexpected rescue, the words of earnest and passionate love, — all seemed parts of some wild strange vision; and twice she turned faintly round, and gazed in Morton's face as if to assure herself that it was all true indeed.

The languid fall of her eyelids, the heavy pressure of her hand upon his arm, the feebleness of her step as he supported her onward, — all made her companion conclude that she was scarcely able to proceed; and as they came to a spot where a rustic bench had been placed upon the bank of the stream, between two tall elms, he led her to it, and, kneeling at her feet, held her hand in his, gazing up into her face with looks of tenderness and apprehension.

"Speak to me, my Louisa," he said, "speak to me but one word to tell me you are better! Oh! you do not know what it is, Louisa, to see the being you most love on earth nearly perish before your eyes! You know not how one longs to hear the dear voice again! You cannot tell, you cannot comprehend what are my feelings towards you this moment, just saved from death."

"Not now, Morton, not now," answered Louisa at length. "I do comprehend, I do know, but do not agitate me now."

"I will not," he said, pressing his lips upon her hand, "I will not utter another word of love. I have been wrong — I have been unkind. I should have chosen a fitter season; but it burst forth without my will. I will be so selfish no more."

"Selfish!" exclaimed Louisa, the tears rising in her eyes. "You selfish! Oh, no, you are all that is generous and kind."

She said no more, but Morton was content, as well he might be, for he knew her who spoke, and was aware that those words could not be light ones. He might be anxious, indeed, to hear more — to tell the tale of love fully, and to win the kind reply — but he really felt what he had said, that it was ungenerous, for his own happiness, to add anything to her emotions at such a moment; and turning from the topic of his love, he sought, tenderly and wisely, to soothe and calm her; and knowing well where the great source of all mental strength, the only fountain of true tranquillity and confidence, is to be found, he said "For how much have we to thank God, Louisa, that one who was able to save you should be wandering accidentally by the river at this early hour. How much comfort, how much joy do those lose who attribute — I may say madly — every event of life to accident or some blind necessity. What a vast and happy conviction it is to believe that your deliverance from such imminent danger is the work of an all-wise and all-merciful being, full of goodness and love."

"It is, indeed," said Louisa; "and that you should be the person, too," she added, thoughtfully, but she did not end the sentence, feeling that she was approaching that upon which she feared to touch. Not, indeed, that her heart at all wavered; not that she was doubtful; not that she was apprehensive. She loved with the first full confiding affection of woman's nature; she loved the only man whom she had ever met with that seemed in her eyes worthy of her love; and she had no hesitation in the present, no dread for the future. But yet there was a something that made her shrink from the avowal of all she felt. Were I writing for women alone, it would be unnecessary to add a syllable, for all have felt, or will feel, as she felt; but these are sensations little understood by men. *We* seldom, very seldom, know the emotions too powerful for speech, for contemplation, almost for endurance;

and more seldom still, when we do experience them, are they with us those of joy. Rarely, too — oh, how rarely! especially when the early and light timidity of youth is past, and we are capable of feeling the deeper and stronger passions of the heart — rarely have we any of that reluctant dread of owning even to ourselves the sensations that master us, that anxious striving to turn away our thoughts from those things thus busy in our bosoms, and to conceal them from all others. But women — all women worthy of the name have been affected as Louisa Charlton was at that moment; all women have hesitated to unveil their heart even to him who possessed it most entirely — ay, more to him, perhaps, than to any other.

Morton pressed her not to say more, however, and after some few words to while away a moment of repose, he asked "Can you go on now, Louisa; or shall I run to Dr. Western's and bring some conveyance for you? I fear to let you sit here longer, wet and agitated as you are."

"Oh, no, no!" she answered; do not leave me. I shall be better in a moment."

But even as she spoke they were joined by another, a perfect stranger to both; but one who seemed not inclined to be long a stranger in any society into which he might be thrown. He was a slim man of about five or six and thirty, with a profusion of dark hair and whisker, curled in the most exquisite manner, with a sweet and simpering countenance, and a complexion peculiarly delicate and clear: in short, a pretty, a very pretty man. He wore a blue coat, rather pale in the hue, with gilt buttons, a yellow waistcoat, and a blue satin handkerchief round his neck, spotted with amber flowers. The rest of his dress consisted of very wide trousers, then in fashion, of a lavender shade of grey, and boots which might have served as mirrors to his beauties, so brilliantly were they blacked and polished. His air was perfectly jaunty and self-satisfied, and as he walked along the bank of the river, before he perceived Louisa and her lover, he rose upon the tips of his toes, as if his elevated opinion of himself required some external demonstration.

As soon as he cast his eyes upon the young lady, however, and

perceived from the very evident signs displayed by her dripping garments and dishevelled hair that some accident had happened, he approached with a hurried step, exclaiming, "Goodness, Ma'am! — Goodness me! You must have tumbled into the water — you are not drowned, I hope. Gracious heaven, what a mercy! But your complexion will be spoilt if you sit in the sun all wet. I dare say you are faint, too — let me recommend you some of the unparalleled Droitwich smelling salts. They have been known to bring a man to life who had lain for dead eight and forty hours;" and, regardless of some impatience in Morton's look and some surprise and reluctance in Louisa's, he brought forth from his pocket, first a corked and sealed bottle, then a small steel cork-screw, and having opened the precious vial, held it to her nose till she gently removed it, saying that she was better, and did not require such a restorative.

"Pray hold it yourself, Ma'am," he cried. "I know I am clumsy; it will revive you in a moment — I am quite sure it will;" and, not to seem ungrateful, Louisa took it at his request. But no sooner had she done so, than his hand dived into his pocket again; and forth he brought another bottle, longer, thinner, and wrapped up in paper covered over with talismanic signs. "Let me call your attention to this article, Ma'am," he said, "and yours, too, Sir, for it is equally important and efficacious to gentlemen and ladies. This is Mrs. Grimsditch's vegetable anti-corrugent dew of jonquille, a sovereign preservation against wrinkles, sun-burning, freckles, moles, discolourations, heat spots, scars, or any other of the great enemies of beauty. It softens, refreshes, nourishes, polishes, and blanches the skin, gives an agreeable coolness to the complexion, against which the sun of India itself cannot contend; and" —

"The lady does not require it, Sir," said Morton, somewhat sharply; "and, at all events, this is not a moment in which she can attend to its virtues."

"Nay, Sir, no offence, I hope;" said their undesired companion. "I did but wish to do anything in my poor power to serve the lady; and as to not requiring it, every one requires it: the

young and beautiful to preserve their loveliness, and others who are somewhat faded to restore the charms they have lost."

Morton felt inclined to knock him down; but he remembered the barber of Bagdad, and took patience while the other went on.

"I did but wish to offer my poor services, Sir, either to the lady or yourself, and seeing you both in a" —

"The only service, Sir, you can render us," said the young gentleman, interrupting him, as a happy thought crossed his mind, "is to run as fast as you can along that path, past the church about half a mile, on to the rectory; and, ringing at the door, to beg Dr. Western to send his carriage, saying that this lady, his ward, has met with a little accident, and —"

"Oh, no — no — you will alarm them!" cried Louisa.

But the stranger, without attending to her, set off good humouredly at full speed towards the rectory; and Louisa turned to Morton with the first smile that had brightened her face that morning, saying, "Let us go; I can go now, and that strange man will frighten our good friends."

"He seems an impertinent puppy," answered Morton, "though a good-humoured one. But are you really able to walk, dearest Louisa?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "he has done me good, do you know; for he has made me laugh, when I felt more inclined to cry."

"To cry!" said her lover, drawing her arm through his, as she rose to proceed.

There was both surprise and sadness in his tone; and, fearful that she had grieved him, or even, perhaps, made him doubt what her feelings were towards him — and though she shrunk, as I have said, from telling her heart's secret, she too well knew the pain of doubt to inflict it on one she loved — Louisa answered, "Yes, Morton, to weep; but do you not know that we women as often weep when we are happy as when we are sorrowful? — and I am very happy — happy in all that has occurred — happy in my deliverance, and that you effected it."

The warm blood glowed in her cheek as she spoke, and the last words were uttered with downcast eyes, and in a low tone. They

were somewhat similiar to those she had before spoken, but the repetition of them was very pleasant to her lover's ear, for they made him feel that the predominant feeling in her heart at that moment was satisfaction at having been saved by him.

"It was, indeed, most fortunate, my Louisa!" he said, as they walked slowly on, "that I was passing at the time; and yet it was a mere accident, brought about by repentance for a fault I committed last night."

"Indeed!" cried Louisa, with a look of surprise, "I saw no fault."

"And yet I was guilty of a great one towards you, dearest girl," replied her lover; "the thought of it broke my rest, and made me rise at daybreak, and go out to wander about till I could go up to the house and repair it. I felt that I was wrong, Louisa, to speak words of love at such a moment as I did last night, when I could tell nothing, explain nothing, and you could make no reply. I feared that I might have agitated, perhaps pained you, and that, whether my hopes were false or true, I might have disturbed your repose. Nay, do not tremble, dear one! I will say nought to move you more at present. You know all now — you understand me fully; and I — I do trust that I understand you. But of one thing be sure, my Louisa, that I would never have ventured to seek your love, if by station and fortune I were not in a position to justify me in so doing."

"And do you imagine, Morton," asked Louisa, with a look almost reproachful, "that station or fortune would make any difference in my regard? It is true I am not a romantic person, and I know that competence is necessary to happiness, but where it is to be found on one side it is sufficient. My dear father taught me to value other things more than wealth or rank — not to undervalue them, but to look upon honour and virtue, and talent as more worthy possessions — and I have not forgotten his lessons."

"I am sure you have not, my Louisa," replied her lover; "and of you I entertained no doubt; but there are friends and guardians to be thought of too, dear girl, and they judge alone by the customs and conventionalities of society. The poor artist, which the good people here, it seems, give me out to be, would

be naturally, perhaps not improperly, rejected as the suitor to the wealthy heiress; while the man of fortune, to whom her riches are no object, would be accepted by the wise men who have her happiness in trust, though the one might be worthy of her, the other not."

"It seems to me very strange and very wrong that it should be so," replied Louisa, thoughtfully; "for, to the one her fortune might be beneficial, enabling him to pursue a high and bright career, to cultivate his abilities, and to advance the very arts which are a glory and a benefit to his country; while, in the hands of the other it would be but of little service to himself or his fellow-creatures."

"But, alas! it is the natural tendency of wealth to accumulate in few hands," answered Morton, "and every society encourages that tendency. Such is especially the case in our own land, where the aristocracy of wealth has daily been gaining ground against the aristocracy of blood. When will there be an aristocracy of virtue, I wonder, Louisa? for it is of that that you and I dream, my beloved. However, it is as well in our case that, as objections might be raised against your desire by those who would think they were acting conscientiously in opposing your marriage with a poor man, no valid obstacle of that kind does exist; and I tell you that such is the case at once, dear girl, not because it would make any difference in your eyes whether I were the poor artist or not, but because I think it may set your mind at ease in regard to the opposition of others."

"I must not take credit to myself," answered Louisa Charlton, "for having thought you the poor artist, Morton; for, though I did so for a few days, I was soon convinced that report was false, and yet I think Mrs. Charlton believes so still."

"Do not undeceive her, my Louisa," exclaimed Morton, eagerly; I have my own views on that point, and have encouraged the idea, though I have, of course, never asserted that it is true. Pray, do not contradict it to any one. You shall hear, whenever we have a moment or two for private conversation, every particular of my fate and history; for, from her I love I can have no concealment; but we have not time now, for here comes the good

rector's carriage at full speed. In the meantime, Louisa, know me as nothing but as report gives me out; and let me see what will be the end of the game that is playing; for you, as well as I, must perceive that the conduct of some persons very near you is not altogether natural."

"You do not mean Dr. Western?" demanded Louisa, warmly.

"Oh, no," replied Morton, "he knows all about me. I mean Mrs. Charlton."

He had no time to say more, for at that moment the carriage of the worthy rector pulled up beside them, and the doctor himself got out in eager haste, followed by the stranger of the smelling-bottle and cosmetic.

"Why, what is this, my dear child?" exclaimed the worthy clergyman. "What is this, Mr. Morton? Both wet — but I see how it is — I understand it all."

"Not all, I think, my dear Sir," replied the young gentleman; and he proceeded to give their friend a brief account of the accident, telling what he had himself seen of Louisa's conduct, as he was hurrying forward from the neighbouring field to save the boy who had fallen into the stream."

"Ah, Louisa, Louisa!" cried the good rector, shaking his finger at her; "impulse, impulse! you, women, always act from impulse, and peril your ownselves without a chance of assisting others. But what has become of the poor boy? He might be drowned while Morton was assisting you."

"Oh, no!" replied Louisa's lover; "he remained struggling gallantly, and seemed to have some idea of swimming, but his fishing-rod was his best friend, for he held on fast with both his hands, and contrived to balance it very cleverly, keeping his head above water till I could return, and draw him out. He is the son of Edmonds, the park-keeper, I think; and as soon as he was on dry land set to work to wind up his line as if nothing had happened."

They were by this time so near the rectory that Louisa would not get into the carriage, but walked on, still leaning on her lover's arm, and accompanied by Dr. Western, while the man in the blue satin handkerchief coolly mounted the box of the carriage, and

rode back, apparently making himself quite at home. What followed after they entered the house need not be detailed, for there is but one reasonable way of treating wet people, which was adopted; and other events call us to another scene.

CHAPTER XV.

When Louisa Charlton went out in the early morning from Mallington House she believed that no one in the house was up but the servants. Such was not the case, however, for Alfred Latimer was already in the library with an aching head and irritated heart. On the preceding evening he had left his mother's house very soon after dinner to seek his old haunts, and to lose a considerable portion of the money he had received from Morton in the morning at play; and now he sat with his cheek resting on his hand in sullen silence, ready to quarrel with any one that might present himself. The door of the library was partly open, and he saw Louisa come down, and go out. At first he thought of following her, and rose to do so; but the moment after he sat down again, saying to himself, "No, I won't — I should only have words with her, I dare say, and I do not want to quarrel with Louisa; but I will bring my mother to reason."

What he called reason is not worth while to inquire into; for every man has a lexicon of his own, very different in its definitions from Johnson's dictionary. He then rose and walked about the room for a few minutes; and then, seeing a book upon the table, he thought that it might be better to amuse himself with any other person's ideas than his own, which at that moment were not very pleasant ones. There had just about that time appeared in England a translation of Schiller's "Robbers," not a very good one, but still conveying some of the great author's spirit and wild vigour, and that book was the one on which Alfred Latimer now laid his hand. It was an accident that decided his fate; and how often does this happen in the course of life? Let any man look back, and narrowly examine the history not only of his own acts but of his own mind and heart, and he will be almost sure to find that some small and seemingly pitiful circumstance, some event of

which he took little notice at the time, has been the key that unlocked one out of the thousand doors of fate, and gave him exit upon the road that he was to pursue for ever.

He read — at first with inattention, almost with disgust — then with interest — then with eager sympathy — and every dark and fiery picture seemed to imprint itself upon his heart and brain. The wild, the stirring eloquence of the poet seemed to address itself directly to him; every moral influence was lost, every exciting vision treasured up. He longed for a wild and free existence — for deeds of adventure and intense passion; virtue, honour, respectability, what were they to him? names — cold, tame, unmeaning names. He took no resolution, he formed no scheme, indeed; but the impression was given: to cast off all restraint, to follow out the passions of his own heart, only more boldly, more rashly. There was a higher, a more intense tone, yielded to his character, but nothing was changed. He had hitherto been led — his aspiration was now to lead; but it was in the same course. He had hitherto been wilful in his own conduct, he was now eager to work his will on others; but the end and object was unchanged. He had sought excitement in all that he had done: he sought excitement still, but of a more intense and vehement character. He sat with that book in his hand far longer — far longer than he had ever been known to read before, and he only laid it down when the clock struck nine; and he rose, saying to himself, "It is time for her to rise. She shall find that I will not be trifled with any more;" and, ringing the bell sharply, he told the servant who appeared at its loud summons to send his mother's maid up to her room with a message, to the purpose that he wished to speak with her immediately. The man retired to obey his orders; but nearly half an hour elapsed without any one appearing, and Alfred Latimer's impatient spirit wrought turbulently within him at the delay. He walked about the room — he looked out of the window — he took up a book, and laid it down again — he muttered most unfilial objurgations against his mother, and sneered at her habits of self-indulgence — till, at length, working himself up into a fit of passion, he hurried out of the library, and was mounting the stairs, when he met the maid coming down to

give him notice that Mrs. Charlton awaited him in her dressing-room. Without ceremony he walked in, with his impatient spirit chafed; and the sight of the fair widow, in an elegant dressing-gown and coquettish cap, did not at all tend to soothe him.

"In heaven's name, what is the matter, Alfred?" demanded Mrs. Charlton, as soon as he entered; "something must have gone wrong, or I am sure you would not have disturbed me at such an early hour" —

"As nearly ten o'clock?" asked Alfred Latimer. "Well, you are quite right; something has gone wrong — everything has gone wrong; and I must have it put right. You know I asked you for fifty pounds yesterday" —

"And I told you, my dear boy, that I had not got it to give," answered Mrs. Charlton, in a soothing tone. "You know, my dear Alfred, that if I had it, you should have it at once."

"You have plenty of money to give parties with, and fine wines, and all sorts of things from London; and to keep horses and carriages, and servants enough, to do nothing," replied her dutiful and affectionate child.

"Alfred! Alfred!" cried his mother. "I never thought I should have heard my son, for whom I have sacrificed so much, speak such words. You know quite well the horses and carriages are Louisa's, not mine. Almost all the servants are hers; and does my own son grudge me the comforts of my home, and even the respectable appearance which I am obliged to keep up? This is sad, indeed!" and Mrs. Charlton wiped away a tear.

"This is all very good, mother," replied Alfred, "but necessity has no law, and money must be found, for money I must have."

"If I could have found it," said Mrs. Charlton, "you should have had it. Do you think if I could have procured it, I would have put off my journey to London, when I had set my heart upon going; but every farthing I had, but just enough for the expenses of the house, I was obliged to pay, because those people, the Marsons, chose to fail, and force me to pay the horrid bill I had there. Four hundred pounds at one blow. Only wait till Louisa

is of age, or till I have carried out what I have in view with regard to her, and you shall have as much as you can desire."

"I cannot wait, and will not wait," replied Alfred Latimer, fiercely. "I have bills to pay as well as you, and they must be paid, too. Why should you not sell, or pawn, some of all your smart jewels. They would soon raise the money; and you are a widow now, and don't want them."

Now Mrs. Charlton was fond of jewels, and had accumulated no inconsiderable store; but still she thought that if the sum required was but fifty pounds, she could part with some, which she would scarcely miss, for her dear boy's sake. "You are unkind, Alfred," she said, "but to show you that I would do anything I can to help you, I will raise the fifty pounds upon some of the trinkets poor Mr. Charlton gave me."

"Fifty pounds!" cried her son. "That would have done yesterday, but it will not do to-day. I have many bills to pay that cannot be put off. One man threatens to arrest me, and another has actually taken out a writ. Now I will be free of all this without further delay. I will have my debts paid — I will have something over, to start upon — and then"—

"But what is the amount?" demanded the lady in consternation.

"A thousand pounds will do, I think," replied Alfred Latimer, coolly; "I have not reckoned it up accurately; but what between Oxford and London, and this cursed place, there must be nearly nine hundred owing, and the rest will set me off again."

"A thousand pounds!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, and then throwing herself back in her chair, she added with an altered tone, "You cannot have it, Alfred."

"Indeed!" he said, with his eyes flashing fire.

"No!" she replied decidedly. "Nor half — nor a third — nor a quarter. There — no more of it! I have told you — and so it must be. You cannot have it, and if you think to frighten me into supplying your extravagance and folly at this rate you are mistaken. I wish you had not disturbed me out of my sleep to hear such nonsense;" and Mrs. Charlton yawned.

There was some reality in her demeanour, and a good deal that was assumed; for she was indeed incensed at her son's demand, and thought that he had taken a peremptory tone merely to alarm her, which could only be met by a cool one; but she was not quite prepared for what was to follow. His manner, too, altered; his brow knit into a heavy frown, he set his teeth close as if afraid of giving way too far to the strong passion within him, and approaching his mother's chair, he said in a low bitter tone, "So you will not sell your diamonds for the relief of your son?"

"Not one," answered Mrs. Charlton.

"Well, then, you shall never see him again," said the young man.

"Pooh!" said Mrs. Charlton, "You know better;" but without another word he turned to the door, and went out, closing it quietly behind him.

Mrs. Charlton was somewhat alarmed; for though she had often seen fits of violent passion in Alfred Latimer, she had never beheld any effort to repress the expression of his rage. If he had cursed and sworn she could have felt quite easy: if he had banged the dressing-room door as he retired it would have been a relief. But the stern low tone, the shut teeth, the quiet exit, had something awful in them; and after pausing for a few minutes in consideration, she rose and rang her bell. Before the maid could appear she heard a horse's feet over the gravel, and, looking out, saw her son riding away from the house on a horse that was always kept for him at Mallington; and when her abigail entered Mrs. Charlton merely said "Do my hair. — Nonsense, he will return soon enough" she added to herself.

In the meanwhile Alfred Latimer rode on down the village and approached the road that ran along by the bank of the stream; but as he was in the act of turning his horse's head as if to follow that path, he suddenly pulled up; thought for a moment; and then, crossing the bridge, approached the park gates. There, he dismounted, tied his beast to the iron bars, and walked with a rapid step in the direction of the park-keeper's house.

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE was a shady grove in Mallington Park, where the trees were tall and thin in the stem, having been suffered to run up close together; and, as ambition appears even to extend to vegetable life, wherever such is the case, each seems to struggle to overtop the other, and get a greater portion of the sunshine than is its due. There was no underwood, except here and there a bush of holly, in which occasionally a stout old cock pheasant would take up his abode, and the wind sighed at liberty through the bolls of the beeches. It was a pleasant place for contemplation on a summer's day, for it was full of calm shade, and if there were any air stirring it was sure to find its way there and breathe more freely under the cool green boughs. Many a winding path, too, had been cut through the grove, wandering in and out amongst the trees, and leaving sufficient space for two persons to walk abreast, but not more; and occasionally a sudden peep of the distant country had been afforded by taking down a tree, which was lost again in a moment as one passed on, like one of those bright fancies that cross the path of thought for an instant but fade ere we can grasp them.

In this grove, about the hour of ten or a little after, on the day that saw the accident which but for Morton's presence must have terminated the career of Louisa Charlton, two persons were walking on slowly together along the paths in earnest conversation. Hither and thither they went from one walk to another, but never issued beyond the cover of the trees. They went hand in hand, too, and one spoke eagerly and rapidly, while the other replied little but by sighs. They were Alfred Latimer and Lucy, the fair young daughter of the park-keeper Edmonds — a dangerous companionship for her. He seemed pressing her vehemently to some step which she was unwilling to take, and ever and anon she raised her eyes, full of tears, to his, and answered, "No, Alfred; no, I cannot. Oh, do not ask me, Mr. Latimer. It would break my father's heart if I were to leave him without telling him where I am going."

"And you will break mine if you refuse, Lucy," replied Alfred Latimer; "you can write to him to-morrow, and tell him you are with me, and that we are going to be married as soon as ever we can be."

But Lucy shook her head mournfully, saying, "He will not believe that — he will not believe that."

"And you doubt it too, Lucy!" cried Alfred Latimer vehemently; "you doubt my word — you think I would break my oath! You do not love me, Lucy, that is very clear. Nay, do not cry now; you will make your eyes red, and every one will see."

Lucy Edmonds wiped the tears away, and replied in a low voice, "You know I love you — you know it too well, or you would not ask me to do what is wrong."

"But it is not wrong," answered Alfred Latimer; "I tell you that I have had a quarrel with my mother, so that I cannot stay any longer here; or we would be married at once; and yet you refuse, though you have promised to love me always and to marry me when I ask you — yet you refuse to go with me and fulfil your promise as soon as it can be done."

"Oh, no," said Lucy; "I only refuse to go with you without my father's knowledge. You know, Alfred, it would be very wicked — it would be very wrong indeed, and I should never be happy after."

"And so you will really make me unhappy for ever, Lucy?" asked the young gentleman; "for you will never see me more, after I have once gone away. I have sworn that I will not return, and I always keep my word. Come, Lucy, come — go back quietly to the house; get some few things ready, and meet me in two hours at the other side of the park," and bending down his head, he kissed her.

"I cannot, I cannot," answered Lucy Edmonds, weeping. "Without my father's leave I cannot come."

Alfred Latimer's cheek was somewhat red, and even to her he could not repress the quick and angry flash of his eye at anything like opposition. Yet he strove to soothe and persuade, but before he could utter many words, issuing suddenly from one of the side paths, Lucy's father himself stood before them. The good man's

brow was stern and dark, and his lip quivering with many mingled emotions.

Poor Lucy trembled in every limb, and turned as pale as death; but Alfred Latimer, though he coloured highly, lifted his head with a haughty toss and a laugh, saying something the meaning of which was not very clear.

"Let go my daughter's hand, Sir," said Edmonds, after gazing at him for an instant; "and never you set your foot in this park again."

"Indeed!" cried Alfred Latimer, with a sneer. "Methinks I shall require to be warned off by some better authority than Master Edmonds, formerly Lord Mallington's park-keeper — if you come to that, what business have you in this park yourself?"

"I have business enough and authority enough for my purpose," replied Edmonds, taking his daughter's hand, and drawing her to him, "and that you will find, Sir, if ever you come here again. I knew you to be bad enough, long ago, but I did not think you were so base as to seek to ruin this poor girl."

The young gentleman gazed at him for an instant with a fierce look, and then turned his eyes to Lucy, who stood by her father, with her limbs shaking and her face drowned in tears. That sight seemed to move him, and he said "I did not seek to ruin her. It is not true. I intended to marry her — ay, immediately."

"False! false!" cried Edmonds. "Don't you think every father in the land has heard such stories. You told her you would marry her I don't doubt, but when you had once got her in your power it would have been a different tale."

"No, it would not," replied Alfred Latimer; "I would have married her, and I will."

"No, that you shall not," replied Edmonds sternly. "You are no husband for my daughter, Sir; keep in your own station; marry in your own station. So shall she, please God; and I will tell you what, Mr. Latimer, I would a great deal rather see her the wife of a honest labourer than the wife of a dishonest gentleman. I don't mean to say you are so — that I know nothing about; but I do know that you would not make her happy, and so you should not have her, even if all your fine speeches were true.

That is done and settled. So, as I said before, do not let me see you here again. Come along, Lucy; come with me," and drawing her away, he turned his steps towards his own house, leaving Alfred Latimer standing in the grove, with his face working with all the unbridled passions that disappointment raised to fury in his heart.

At a quick pace Edmonds hurried on in silence, with his eyes gazing out before him, but his mind busy upon any other thing than the scene on which they lighted. He noticed not, he did not seem to perceive that the trembling limbs of his daughter could hardly bear her on, and that he dragged her along with him, rather than supported her, as she hung upon his arm.

But when they came to a little clump of trees behind the garden at the back of the house he suddenly stopped, and turning to Lucy, he said "I will not tell your mother, my child, for it would make her wretched."

"Oh, father, I did not intend to do any wrong," replied Lucy Edmonds, with the tears streaming down her face; "I would not have gone with him. Indeed, I would not."

"I know it, Lucy, love," replied her father throwing his arms round her, and pressing her to his breast. "I heard a good deal as I came up the walk, Lucy, and I know that though you have been a silly girl to listen to him at all, yet it was not in your heart to do any wrong — the more base he for wishing to make you. But there is one thing, Lucy," he continued, gazing at her earnestly, "there is one thing you must promise me upon your word, and as you would have God's grace not to do wrong — you must promise me never willingly to see or speak with this young man any more."

"Oh, father," replied Lucy Edmonds "he loves me — indeed, indeed he does. And I — I" —

"You think you love him," answered her father; "Perhaps you really do, and if so I am very sorry for it, Lucy, for his marriage with you is not even to be thought of. I would not give you to him, my girl, if he were the richest and the highest man in the land."

"But perhaps you may change, father," said Lucy — "perhaps he may change."

"When he does I may, and then I will tell you," answered Edmonds; "but in the meantime I must have your promise, Lucy, never to see him or speak with him, willingly at least, without my consent and knowledge — Lucy, you would not surely disobey me?"

"Oh no, father, no," replied Lucy Edmonds; "I will do as you bid me in all things, and I promise you that I will not see or speak with him without your knowledge and consent. You know a great deal better than I do — but yet I am sure he loves me."

Edmonds shook his head with a sad and painful smile. "So thinks every woman," replied he, "of the man that ruins her. If she does not, she is worse than he is. But come, my child; and keep your promise, and that promise will keep you safe. Wipe your eyes, or go and walk in the garden for awhile. Your mother has had one sad fright this morning, and though she is well accustomed to bear up under sorrows and cares, yet there is no need she should have too many at once, Lucy."

"Oh, what has happened?" cried Lucy, drying her own tears, and looking eagerly in her father's face.

"Why, your brother fell into the river, and would have been drowned if Mr. Morton, the gentleman who came up to the cottage the other day, had not plunged in and got him out," replied Edmonds; and then added, in a somewhat bitter tone, "Ay, he is a gentleman, indeed; but this young fellow" —

He did not finish the sentence, but Lucy Edmonds cast down her eyes, with a cheek glowing like fire. It was her own heart accused her, and she asked herself "Have I been listening to tales of love, without my parents' knowledge, from the lips of one whom they disapprove, while sorrow and care have come so near their dwelling? I will do so no more," and as she thus thought she raised her eyes to her father's face again, saying aloud, "I will go to my mother at once. I am very sorry that I was wrong, and I will tell her, too, all that has happened, but not now, father. I will tell her to-night or to-morrow. Indeed,

it will be better, for then if I should be in any difficulty, and you not near, she can tell me what I ought to do."

"That 's a good girl," replied her father, laying his hand upon her shoulder and kissing her brow; "act this way always, Lucy, and you will be in no danger. To-day you have been in more than you know of;" and taking her hand, he led her on the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

For at least five minutes after the park-keeper and his daughter had left him Alfred Latimer remained standing in the grove, giving way to the vehemence of his passion, muttering vain curses and rash and angry threats against the man who had interfered only to save his own child. "I will have her," he said at length; "I will have her in spite of him; and I will have revenge, too — curse me, if I won't;" and, stamping on the ground, and shaking his fist, he walked slowly away towards the lodge. His eyes were bent down, and, in bitter meditation, he saw little or nothing that passed around him. He marked not the deer as they bounded away out of the fern; he took no notice of the hare that started from its form almost at his feet, and scudded away across the upland, pausing here and there with uplifted ears to listen for the sounds of pursuit. When he reached the gates, he opened them, and went out without noticing that two men were standing at the corner of the park wall; and, unfastening his horse, he had got his foot in the stirrup when one of the two watchers ran forward and laid his hand upon his shoulder, saying "Alfred Latimer, Esquire, I believe?"

"Yes, Sir," replied the young gentleman, turning first red and then pale. "Who the devil are you?"

"Only an officer of the sheriff of Middlesex, Sir," replied the man, "with a writ against you, backed by the sheriff of the county, for a trifle you owe to Mr. Jones, of Piccadilly. Don't doubt but you 'll soon be able to settle the matter, so we had better go back to your house, where I have just been paying my respects."

Alfred Latimer gazed at him with a look of hesitation for a moment, but gradually his face assumed a more determined and a fiercer aspect, and he replied "No; I will not go back to the house to beg of my own mother. I'd rather go to gaol."

"Oh, Sir, I 've got nice apartments; quite at your service, Sir," replied the officer. "Airy situation, Sir, looking upon the river. Do you travel by coach, Sir, or would you like to have a shay?"

"I travel on horseback," cried Alfred Latimer, springing into the saddle, and striking his horse with the spurs. The bailiff made a snatch at the rein, but missed it, and the horse dashed on, hitting him on the shoulder with its chest and knocking him back upon the road.

"Stop him! stop him!" shouted the officer to his follower; but long ere the other man came up, the young gentleman was far upon the road, and, galloping on at full speed, was soon hidden by the angle of the park wall.

"I shall be followed," thought the young man, who, unaccustomed to such proceedings, saw in imagination the sheriff's officers pursuing him, like a hunted hare, with a whole troop of mounted constables to back them. "I shall be followed! I will take to Wenlock Wood. Then let them catch me if they can." Thus thinking, he spurred forward, till passing the cottage of Blackmore, the gardener, and the mill beyond, he came to the end of the park wall on that side, and looking round to see if there were any one on the road to indicate the path he had taken to his fancied pursuers, he turned up a narrow sandy path, which ran over the hill between Mallington-park and some corn-fields. It soon led into a green lane, overhung by thick shrubs and bushes, and along this he spurred at a rapid pace, till the banks opened out, and gave him egress upon a wild and desolate looking common, with a thick wood about half a mile to the right.

At the mouth of the lane, Alfred Latimer pulled up his horse for a moment and listened; but, whether from excited imagination or not, he felt sure that he heard the sound of horses' feet, and, spurring on again across the common — often obliged to turn to avoid this great mass of bushes, or that rock or large clump of

trees — he reached the edge of Wenlock Wood, and, without drawing a rein, turned round to look behind him. He now plainly perceived three or four men on horseback at the other side of the common; but they did not seem to discover him, if of him they were in pursuit, for they were riding on in a different direction from that in which he himself was following; and, pushing his horse forward down a narrow cart-road, he had soon passed the outer belt of planting, where the trees were younger but closer together, and reached a wilder part of the wood, where tall immemorial oaks, with young saplings scattered between, rose far apart from each other, some still green and flourishing, some in various states of decay. The ground from which they sprung was rugged and uneven, in some places covered with high fern, in some rounded with masses of thick brushwood. Here appeared a deep pit, with the little shining pond in the bottom; here rose a tall rock or a high bank, bearing ashes and beeches on the top; and ever and anon a piece of green sward appeared in the midst, affording free footing for the horse. To look upon it, it seemed at first sight an inextricable maze, through which no chance traveller could find his way, but to the eyes of Alfred Latimer the whole scene was familiar, for thither had he often resorted from the days of his boyhood, exploring its recesses with dog and gun, although, to say sooth, being within one of the manors of the Earl of Mallington, he had no right to exercise there his propensities for the chase.

Cutting as straight across as the various obstacles would permit towards the highest bank which the scene displayed, he skirted it along to a spot where a number of old oaks had congregated themselves under the bank, concealing its rugged face from the view. The trees above stretched forth their branches to those below, and several clumps of a younger growth stood forward before the rest, making the mass appear, at a little distance, one close and impenetrable thicket. So it would have seemed, indeed, to any one riding, even so closely by the side of the trees as Alfred Latimer, if the eye were the only guide on the occasion; for though the wood sometimes came forward in bold prominence, sometimes retreated, leaving a deep glen or glade between the two nearest

points, yet still at the bottom appeared a thick woody screen hiding the crag. To Alfred Latimer, however, the place was, as I have said, familiar, and he rode along for about a third of a mile without pause or examination, except, indeed, by a quick and furtive glance behind, to see whether his pursuers had yet appeared.

No one was seen, however, and in the end, he drew his rein just at the mouth or entrance of one of the glades I have mentioned, gazing round on every side. Then, dismounting, he took the beast's bridle on his arm, and led him down amongst the trees, apparently to the very closest and thickest part; but just at the end a little path was to be discovered on the right, so small that the entrance was not easily discernible amongst the tangled brambles and thorns, which in that place rose high up the bolls of the trees. Alfred Latimer, however, knew the precise spot by an old holly which stood forward, as if to protect and conceal the mouth of the path; and, leading his horse round, he pulled him unwillingly into the little road, the horse resisting, from time to time, as if it doubted the safety of the way it was taking, and its master bestowing several fierce cuts upon its flank, to prove that he knew better than it. The path soon led to a more open space behind the screen of oaks; and satisfied that he was hidden from all observing eyes, the young gentleman proceeded more patiently between the trees and the high craggy bank till he reached the mouth of a deep cavern — whether the work of nature or of art who can now say? Many such, however, are to be found in various parts of England, some well known to the geologist and the wanderer in search of the picturesque; others unrecorded by tourist and traveller, and only familiar to the midnight assassin of game, and the still more free speculator in the property of others.

Without fear or hesitation, however, Alfred Latimer led his horse in, who, fancying it, apparently, a newly-invented kind of stable, followed very willingly under the rocky arch; and still holding the bridle over his arm, the young gentleman seated himself upon a large stone, saying aloud with a laugh, "Now let them catch me if they can, the scoundrels."

He then turned his ear to listen, but no sound was heard except the whispering of the wind through the trees; and satisfied

that he had deceived his pursuers, if there were any, he proposed to remain an hour or two where he was, and then, making his way through the wood to a village about three miles distant, to pursue his course towards London, where he thought he would sell his horse, and with the money thus provided, and what remained of the sum he had borrowed from Morton, embark for the continent. It was a pleasant and a joyous scheme to his rash mind; visions of wild adventure crowded upon him; dreams of pleasure, not very pure or high, presented themselves to his mind's eye, as he sat and meditated, and there seemed but one drawback to the plan. Had Lucy Edmonds been with him it would have been complete; for he loved her with as much love as he was capable of. It was all corporeal, indeed: it was her beauty, her grace, that he thought of; but still it was, in some sort, love, for out of a thousand as fair he would have chosen her as his companion; and might have been constant to her for a time, till passion had sated itself, and burnt out its own flame. We must not pause to picture all the sensations that he felt as he sat there and thought of her. The eager desire to possess her, in spite of all considerations, and all obstacles; the wild schemes that suggested themselves to his mind; or the fierce and angry yearning for vengeance upon her father. For that father's feelings or duties he had no thought — no consideration. It was enough that he had stepped in to thwart and disappoint him — to snatch the promised joy from his hand. That alone was an offence not to be forgiven by his proud and vehement spirit; but when he recollected the stern and bitter words the park-keeper had used — the almost scornful rejection of his proposal to condescend so far as to marry a poor peasant's daughter, his heart felt all on fire with impotent rage, and again he clenched his hand and stamped his foot upon the ground till his horse started back, and nearly pulled the bridle from his arm.

The young man caught it fast, however, and angrily struck the poor beast a blow in the face with his clenched fist, exclaiming, "Will you too?"

As he did so he thought he heard a rustle in the further part of the cavern, and turning round he gazed into the depth with some

trepidation. He knew that it was of considerable extent, for he had explored it more than once, and, what with a turn about thirty feet from the mouth, it might run into the cliff some fifty or sixty yards. But the darkness of the interor was so profound at that time of day, when the sun was over the bank, and the thick trees before the mouth produced a deeper gloom, that he could see nothing. The next instant, however, a voice from within exclaimed, "You seem mightily put out, Master Latimer. What is the matter?"

The voice was followed by the sound of steps, but it was not till the person who had spoken had come forward that Alfred Latimer could see anything through the darkness. He then perceived advancing towards him a short, square-looking figure, which gradually assumed the appearance of a man dressed in a sailor's jacket and trousers, with a striped shirt, and no waistcoat. A black handkerchief was twisted lightly round the neck, and the bushy black whiskers extending under the chin, and almost covering the throat, at first gave him the appearance of having another handkerchief bound round his jaws. His head was covered with strong curling dark hair, and his face was bronzed with exposure to sun and wind, which gave an additional look of fierceness to a countenance naturally stern and forbidding.

At first the young gentleman did not recognise the personage who seemed so familiar with his own name; but, after a moment's consideration, he exclaimed, "Ah! is that you, Jack Williams? Why, it is so long since you have been here, and the place is so dark, I did not know you. You have not shown yourself since that night when we shot the pheasants in the park, and were obliged to run for it."

"That would not have made me run far," answered Williams; "but I had other matters on hand, Mister Latimer. I have been here more than once since, however, but you were away. What 's in the wind now, Sir, that you are hiding here? Tell me if you like— don't tell me if you don't like. Only if you want help here 's your man."

"Why, I have had a quarrel with my good mother, Jack," replied Alfred Latimer. "She keeps me shorter of money than

ever; and I have determined to leave her, and seek my fortune where I can."

"I hope you have brought some stock in trade with you," answered the other; "for fortune can't be bought and sold without fortune, as I have found out long ago."

"No, indeed," answered the young gentleman, who was restrained by certain doubts and misgivings as to his old acquaintance's habits, from acknowledging that he had money about him. "I have got nothing but a few shillings and my horse; but that I intend to sell as soon as I can find a market."

"Ah — well — you are not up to things yet, I see," replied Williams. "I would not have come out of such a house as that if I had been you without bringing away enough to live for a year or two, at least. But what are you hiding for? — are you afraid she will send after you? Why, you must be of age by this time."

"Oh, no, it is not that," said Latimer, who, on reflection, saw that the tale of his adventure with the bailiffs would but tend to confirm the representation he had made of the state of his purse. "She would not even give me enough to keep me out of prison, and just as I was at the park gates a fellow came up, and tapped me on the shoulder. But I jumped on my horse, and rode over him."

"Well done! well done!" cried Williams, slapping him on the shoulder; "on my life, you will turn out a capital fellow. Just at the park gates, eh? I suppose you had been up to bid good-by to the pretty little girl there. Why the devil did you not bring her with you. A man is always the better for having a woman with him; but I suppose it was want of money, Master Alfred. If that 's the case, speak out. You were kind to me once, and one good turn deserves another. So, as I've got a little prize-money here; if a ten-pound note will help you, it 's quite at your service, Sir. You can pay me when you can, you know, and no hurry; and we can send a message to pretty Lucy to join you where you like."

The face of Alfred Latimer had turned various colours while his companion spoke; for he had imagined that his pursuit of Lucy Edmonds had been concealed from all eyes till that morning, and

at first he was by no means pleased to find that it was known and commented upon by others; but as thought hurried him rapidly on, the idea suggested itself to his mind that perchance he might make the services of such men as the one who now spoke to him of use in attaining the objects that floated vaguely before his imagination. He formed no distinct scheme, it is true, but dim and obscure fancies of carrying off the poor girl from her home came across his brain. He knew she loved him, and believed that she would easily forgive some little force, which might spare her the struggle between duty and affection. He left the plan, then, to be arranged at an after period, and replied, "No, no, Williams — you are a good fellow;" and he grasped his hand; "but I will not take your little money from you, however much I may want it. I will sell my horse, which is worth fifty pounds anywhere, and I think I can get some more from a friend. But it was not want of money stopped Lucy and I. It was that — as the devil would have it — up came her father just as we were talking about it; and he found out all, and took her away. He has made her promise, I dare say by this time, not to go."

"Such promises are soon broken," answered Jack Williams, with a laugh.

"Ay, so they are," said Alfred Latimer; "but I have a scheme in my head, if I can get some good fellows who don't stand upon trifles to help me. When I have got together a little money so as to be sure that she and I will have enough to go where we like, I will tell you more of it."

"You may count upon me, Sir," replied the other, "I will lend a hand, whatever it is. But no harm must come to the girl."

"But how did you know anything about the affair?" asked Alfred Latimer, willing to change the subject for a time till he had matured his plans; "I thought I had kept it very close."

"Ay, ay," rejoined Williams, smiling, "but I have been hereabouts for a fortnight; and there have been more eyes in Mallington Park than Edmonds thinks of. But what is your plan, Sir? I am no bad hand at scheming, and you are a young one. Two heads are better than one, too, they say."

"Why, I have not yet quite made up my mind," replied Alfred Latimer; "and it requires to be thought of well. Lucy is willing enough to come, and would have been far away with me by this time if her father had not come up; but now he will talk to her, and preach to her, and forbid her to see me any more, though I offered him to marry her at once."

"The devil you did!" exclaimed Williams in great surprise. "Why the man must be a fool."

"Ay — but he threw in my teeth that I was fonder of bold, wild fellows, who have some courage and some spirit," answered the young gentleman, "than of a set of puling coxcombs, such as one meets in society, and a great deal more of such cant. Now, I dare say Lucy will be watched and looked after, and persuaded not to come out to see me."

"Oh! we will soon manage that, Sir," said Jack Williams, "if he won't let her come, why, I would go and take her, if I were you. If you mean to marry her, the fool of a father should be forced to what is good for her and him too."

"Hark!" said Latimer, in a low voice. "There are steps coming near!"

"I dare say," answered the other, "it is Bill Maltby; I expect him soon, and if it be any one else, I will break his head. But you get farther back into the shade — you can take your horse into the turning."

"I know, I know," answered Alfred Latimer; and retreating as quietly as he could towards the back of the cavern, he stopped where he judged from what he had observed of Jack Williams's approach, that neither he nor his horse could be seen, and thence watched the mouth of the den at which his companion stood with his broad bull-like chest.

There, for the first time, a question suggested itself to the young man's mind somewhat difficult to solve, but not very pleasant to leave in doubt. What was Jack Williams's motive for lying concealed in Wenlock Wood? He had been in former days anything but famous either for good conduct or timidity in the commission of evil. One of the most notorious poachers in the country, though the son of a respectable farmer in the neighbour-

hood, he had filled the whole country round with his exploits, and had only escaped punishment by mingled boldness and skill. Once, indeed, so the tale went, he had been detected in the act and taken, after desperate resistance; but he was at that time a mere lad, and his father's entreaties to the owner of the game, who happened to be his own landlord, had saved the son from the consequences of his offence, though only on the condition that he should be sent to sea. To sea he accordingly went, and returned, after a short time, with his moral health, at least, not at all improved by his marine excursion. All these things, and many more not very creditable to his friend, Alfred Latimer remembered; but he had no time to carry his speculation as to the cause of his present concealment very far before the steps he had heard sounded close to the cave, and another figure darkened the mouth.

CHAPTER XVIII.

As Alfred Latimer stood in the shadow of the cave, he could see without being seen; and he very soon perceived that the visitor was no other than his dissolute companion Bill Maltby. An unusual degree of eagerness appeared in Maltby's manner as he first met Williams, but their voices soon dropped almost to a whisper, though their words were as rapid as ever. Knowing both parties well, however, Latimer did not think it necessary to use much ceremony in joining them, and coming forward again, with the feet of his horse announcing his approach, he advanced to the spot where they were standing, catching a few words which Williams uttered in a louder tone.

"No, no," the man said, "he is not up to that yet. He will be one day, when he learns a little better."

By this time the young gentleman was close to them; and turning round, as if he had previously forgotten his proximity, and had been talking of some one else, Williams proceeded, "Ah, Mr. Latimer! You see I have got a companion, Bill. But I think he is frightened about nothing;" and he proceeded to relate to the other the story of Alfred Latimer's adventure with the bailiffs.

"Poo!" said Maltby, "I saw the two fellows drinking at the Bagpipes, and waiting for the coach to return to London. You can go back quite well now, if you like, Latimer, for the old Blue always passes at eleven, and it is well nigh one now."

"He is not going back at all just yet," answered Williams, speaking for his young companion; "but you can go on in safety if you like, Sir, for you hear what Bill says."

"I am sure they followed me part of the way," said Latimer, "and I saw some people riding on the common."

Bill Maltby laughed. "So did I," he said; "I saw Squire Middleton and his two sons and the keeper on their ponies. But I saw the two fellows who came down last night drinking a glass of brandy-and-water in the coffee-room of the Bagpipes, and one of them told me they were waiting for the coach. So you can go now quite well, Mr. Latimer; there 's no risk in the world."

It needed no great penetration on the part of Alfred Latimer to see that his two companions wished to get rid of him; a very unpleasant perception it is, which is almost sure to prick upon some tender point; but vanity does not always resent the injury in the same manner. Sometimes she takes herself off in silent indignation, sometimes she stays out of pure perverseness, and uses that as the most obvious way of avenging herself. In the case of Alfred Latimer she had very nearly persuaded him to remain where he was, and curiosity added her voice, for the young gentleman longed to see what scheme his two companions had to execute, very well understanding that they were about something which they thought, to use Jack Williams's expression, "he was not up to." Now, Alfred Latimer had a strong inclination to prove to them that he was "up to anything," and his vanity was equally mortified at being found one too many, and at being judged unequal to any undertaking. He paused not to consider whether it was the wickedness and the folly, or the daring and the skill to which they considered him incompetent.

Nevertheless several motives induced him to beat his retreat. They were two to one, and not persons to be lightly quarrelled with. He proposed also to employ them afterwards, and it was not worth while to have any disagreement with them then. The

town, too, towards which his steps were bent was at a considerable distance, and he wished to reach London as early as possible on the following day. Deciding upon his course, then, but resolving to show the two men with whom he spoke at some future period that he was not one to be daunted by trifles, but perhaps might lead while they were obliged to follow, he led his horse out of the cave, and walked on with the bridle over his arm, between the old trees and the high cliffy bank. The man Williams accompanied him, giving Bill Maltby a sign to stay behind, and when they had got a sufficient distance to be out of earshot, he said in a civil and kindly tone "Well, Mr. Latimer, when you have settled your business, and like to go on with that little affair of pretty Lucy Edmonds you have nothing to do but to come and let me know. I did not speak of it before Bill Maltby there, for there 's no use in telling him anything about it till the time comes, even if we do then; but you see, as it 's very likely that I shan't be just where I am now when you come back, you must ask Bill where I am, for he 'll know. I' ll help you as far as I can, you may be sure."

Thus saying, he held out his hand, and without any consideration of all with which that hand might be stained — and probably the spots upon it were not few — Alfred Latimer took it, and with that grasp received the contagion of a foul mental disease mortal to the better life of the heart. He then rode on upon his way, and Jack Williams returned to his companion in the cave, whose first question was "What have you done the young cove out of, Jack?"

"I 've done him out of nothing," answered the other, in a grave tone, for he was one of those men who, though carried as it were by an irresistible impulse along an evil course to one bad act after another, yet feel throughout the whole the gloom and sadness of crime upon them, who have not that levity of spirit which gives a temporary sunshine to some of the wicked, but who, with a cold and stern determination, follow the way they have laid out for themselves with the shadow of their fate always upon them. "I have done him out of nothing, Bill," he said, "first, be-

cause I did not want; and next because he has devilish little to be done out of."

"Why didn't you want?" asked Bill Maltby, "he had money enough last night, and it 's no bad joke to clean out such a gull as that."

"He 's not so much a gull as you think," answered Williams. "He wants a little experience or so, but that will come; and there 's a good deal of determined devil in him, I can tell you, as you 'll find out one day. Then as to money, he said he had got very little, and you can't tell how he may have spent it, since you saw him last night. But if he had had the Mint in his breeches pocket I wouldn't have put my hand in — first, because he 's always been civil and kind to me; and next because he 's one of us in some sort already, and will be more so before long."

"Ay, ay, so you think," said Bill Maltby; "but you 'll find yourself twisted there. His mother will give him money enough when she finds he 's resolute with her, and then he 'll see us all at the devil; so you had better make hay while the sun shines, Jack. I will, for one, and get out of him all that I can."

Williams looked at him with a grim smile. "You are mistaken, Bill," he said; "there are some roads on which if you take but two or three steps, you never can go back again, do what you will, and ours is one. This lad has already got his feet upon it, and he has got something now in hand that will carry him on further than he thinks; so there 's no going back for him. But let us talk about this other job. When did you say the fellow would pass by?"

"Why, I told him to meet me over at Sturton at three," answered his companion, "and that I would get him a good sale for his stuff, so he 'll pass here about two, or a little after. Now you see, Jack, we must settle what 's to be done, for I suppose you won't like to finish him exactly?"

"No," said Williams, thoughtfully; "no, not unless he shows fight. Then, when one's blood is up, no one can tell what may happen. But what of that? I don't see what difference that makes. The law says it 's all the same whether you relieve a fellow of the superfluous and let him go, or cut his pipe and stop his whistling. One 's hanged for it all the same if one 's found out."

"Ay, but I 'll tell you what difference it makes in this matter," said Bill Maltby. "You see if you intended to do the thing out and out I 'd better stay with you and lend a hand; but if you only mean to cut the canister I had better go on to Sturton, and speak to the fellows there about taking some of his stuff. Then I can meet him, and be quite civil to him and sorry for what has happened."

"Ay, ay, Bill, take care of yourself," replied Jack Williams. "There, don't look cross at me; I think you are quite right. There is no use of putting two heads into a noose when one will do. What has he got about him? can you tell?"

"A cool hundred, I should think," replied Billy Maltby. "I saw him flash a five-pound note of the Huntingdon bank, so I just gave him a hint as a friend that he had better get them changed, for that there was a talk of that money shop going. I thought flimsies wouldn't suit our purpose so well as the heavy, and, besides, I wanted to know how much he had got, and fancied such a hint might make him speak. It didn't though; but afterwards he said he had sold for a hundred at Huntingdon and Kimbolton three or four days ago, and then he had heard nothing against the bank. He thanked me, however, for my advice, and said he would get all he had changed before he went further."

"He seems to be no fool, then," said Williams, in a thoughtful tone.

"Yes, he is, and no, he is not," answered Billy Maltby. "He seems quite a ninny in some things, and shrewd enough in others."

"A sort of man to remember the cut of one's jib well, eh?" asked Jack Williams, "and to swear to it stoutly afterwards, I dare say."

Maltby nodded his head, and his companion mused for several minutes without making any further observation. His next words, however, showed upon what his thoughts had turned, for at length he said abruptly "No! I won't do for him; it 's not come to that yet, Bill; but I 'll take care he shan't see me. You go on to Sturton, and have all ready there, and leave the rest to me. You are quite sure of the way he will come?"

"Quite, unless the devil puts his foot in it," answered Bill

Maltby; "for I told him of the red post, and of the three roads, and that if he went either to the right or to the left he would lose himself to a certainty. So he said he would take care — that he was fond of a country walk above all things, but did not want to be one of the babes in the wood."

The scoundrel laughed gaily at his own conceit; and Jack Williams smiled as far as he was capable of smiling. Some further conversation then took place, and at length the younger man took his departure for the little town, humming a slang song as he went as carelessly, as if the dark weight of sin and crime rested not on his heart — no thought of punishment here or hereafter troubled the enjoyment of the hour.

His companion displayed a different aspect; for, going a little further into the cave, he seated himself, with his long sinewy arms crossed upon his broad chest, and with his eyes bent upon the ground, and his brow gathered into a frown, remained in dark and seemingly gloomy thought for the next half hour. What was it that troubled him? Was it remorse, or apprehension? Did conscience speak? Was her voice at length heard, or did he look forward to the dark result, even in this world, of the deeds in which he was engaged? Did he calculate nicely the chances of the losing game he was playing? Did he think how seldom any evil act remains unpunished — how rarely one foul deed does not lead to deeds still fouler — how impossible it is for any man to say "This shall be the last?" No. If remorse was felt, it was but as a shadow — impalpable, assuming no definite form — vague, vast, and gloomy, but undefined. He knew not well why, he cared not to inquire, but the sun seemed to have gone out for him, and all was grey. He remembered how, when he was a little boy, and had sported in the neighbouring fields and woods, all nature had had charms for him, and every object a delight. The singing of the birds had been sweet music, the breath of the fresh air the finest of perfumes, a new flower or a piece of painted glass a treasure, and everything to a healthy frame and an uncorrupted mind had been full of beauty and enjoyment. But the light had passed away, the bird-song jarred upon his ear, the air seemed sultry as it came near him, the flowers were trampled unheeded

under foot. In the fierce burst of animal passion, in the keen excitement of strife, of revelry, or of play, were to be found the feverish pleasures which formed all that was left to him. He knew not how it was or why, but he felt that it was so, and he felt it with regret; for memory told him, and told him true, that in the past he had left behind jewels that the present had nothing to equal, and which the future could never restore — the jewels of the heart.

He pondered not much upon such things it is true, he did not wish to think of them, but still that cloud hung above him, shadowing all his thoughts. He turned his mind to the adventure before him; he laid out his plan; he determined on his conduct — not with any consecutive train of ideas, for his mind wandered to a thousand other considerations — but, pursuing a devious and uncertain course, still returned to the object in view, and then darted off to something new again. Yet over the whole was the cloud and the shadow, and all was gloomy and stern.

At length, rising quietly, he said, "It is time to be jogging, the fellow can't be long first — I may as well have a pistol in case of need. I will take all the things with me, and go round by the back of the park, so as to come into Mallington the other way;" and going into the recesses of the cave he put a brace of pistols into his pocket, a powder flask, a small bar of iron like a marlin spike, and wrapped up a pair of thick boots in a bundle with some clothes, and then taking a heavy stick formed of a sapling oak, with the rounded root at the end, he thrust it through the tie of the handkerchief, which contained his goods and chattels, laid it on his shoulder, and walked out of the cave.

With a slow step, and looking round him on every side — for those even habituated to the commission of crime can never free themselves altogether from the consciousness of being watched — watched by the Almighty eye, if not by that of man — he advanced, forcing his way through the trees, till he reached the side of a small path, which ran from Mallington to Sturton. There was a horse road on the other side of the wood, and a cart road by the bank of the river, but this was one of those short cuts worn by the habitual feet which had passed from time immemorial — every day

some one, but rarely more than one or two, so that the grass had time to grow and flourish; and very often, especially in the spring time, the brambles, would shoot across and strive to interrupt the way, as if to reclaim it to wild nature. There the man looked round him again on every side, and examined every corner of the brushwood, and every tree. It was evident that he was seeking for a hiding place, but it was with difficulty he found one which suited his purpose. At length, however, he pitched upon a spot where, underneath a tall tree, had grown up some high bushes, flanking the path. Behind them was a nook, which concealed him from any one coming from Mallington, while to the right it was free from all obstacles which might have impeded the use of his arm, except a small branch shooting out from one of the hawthorns, which he cut away with his knife. He then threw the bough into the wood behind him, and took up his position, sitting on the ground with his head leaning easily against the trunk of the tall tree. To have seen him any one might have supposed that there was a heart at ease — a mind unconscious of any burden, so quiet and unconcerned was the attitude into which his limbs had fallen. But was it so, indeed? Oh, no! Even when conscience is altogether silent evil carries its own punishment about with it. The doubt — the apprehension — the agitation of thought that precedes the act — the burning excitement when it is committed — the pallid satiety of the intervals — the parched aridity of the heart till a new crime supplies a fresh draught of the same fiery, stream which but regenerates the thirst it is intended to assuage, — all, all are the slow commencement of that hell to which the wicked go down more slowly though more surely than they think. He lay and listened for the coming foot-falls, and moodily — more moodily than before — he pondered over the past and the present. Yet he thought not to forbear. Why should he forbear? he asked himself. His lot was drawn, his fate sealed, his road chosen. There was no returning; and in the course he was upon it was but weakness or cowardice to draw back from any action he had determined upon. Such was his gloomy philosophy, and he was not one to vacillate. Nevertheless, when a thrush sitting on the tree above his head began to pour forth its afternoon

song, there was something in the sound that seemed to touch him. It was like the voice of an angel calling to him in pity to forbear; and, whatever were his thoughts, he murmured, "I will not hit him hard."

The bird continued to sing for a moment or two, and as if to divert his mind from its appeal, he looked around, while the fresh air breathed upon his cheek, and the light and shade of the green leaves danced before his eyes. "This is a pleasant place," he thought; "one could lie here all day." The very idea was a pleasant and refreshing thing, like a fountain to the wanderer in the desert; but he would not rest upon it either; and he carelessly plucked a flower that grew near, looking into the blue petals, and gazing, though without thought of its wonders, upon the marvellous economy within. "How beautiful these wild flowers are," he said to himself again. "My poor sister Mary, that used to love them so, was like one of them — poor thing! — Poo! I am a fool," and he cast the flower away.

Heaven only knows had he gone on, and listened to the voice which strove to make itself heard, what might have been the result. But the hour of mercy had passed by; he had turned three times from the appeal that might have saved him; and almost as the flower fell from his hand, the bird ceased its song, and took wing from the branch above. There was a footstep coming near; and rising up he looked through the branches upon the path. There was a gaily-dressed man — he whom we have described as coming upon Morton and Louisa Charlton as they sat by the stream — walking slowly forward with a sauntering and self-conceited air, looking now and then at the wood scenery around, and now and then turning his eyes to a memorandum-book, which he held in one hand, while with a pencil in the other he wrote something on the page. On he came step by step; twice he paused, and wrote; and then he advanced again, all unconscious of the danger near.

Williams grasped the thick stick he had brought with him, the bundle had been cast down long before. He set his teeth, compressed his lips, and hardly breathed. His heart beat, though he would have stilled its beatings; his temples throbbed, though

in moments of greater danger his bosom had been calm, his brain cool. It was not fear, it was not doubt that was upon him — it was the troubled expectation of crime.

Two or three more steps and the wayfarer was close to him; he passed the tall tree and the low bushes, and then a thundering blow upon the head dashed down his hat upon his brow, and laid him on the ground. The bludgeon was raised again to strike him as he lay, but he was silent and motionless — so still that his very tranquillity seemed to plead for mercy.

"I hit him harder than I intended," said his assailant running round the bushes, and gazing upon him without venturing to move his victim. Then, bending down his head, he listened. "He breathes! He is but stunned," and quickly putting his hands into the traveller's pockets, he drew out a heavy purse crammed well nigh full of gold; there was a pocket-book also, with some bank notes in it, but that he threw down again, and, satisfied with his first prize, gazed round him for a moment. All was still; and he heard the chirping of the grasshopper. Then darting back behind the bushes, he snatched up his bundle; but before he went, returned to take another look at what he had done. He bent down his head again; but now he could hear no breath; and with a quick step he hurried away up the path for about a couple of hundred yards, then turned into the wood again, and pursuing a circuitous course came out upon the common at the back of Mallington Park, some two miles from the scene of his crime, and quite on the other side. At this time, indeed, it appeared as if he were rather going to, than coming from, the spot where the deed had been committed; but there was close by a small country road leading down, under the park wall, to Mallington, and scarcely had his feet entered upon it when he beheld two labouring men walking on before him.

His first impulse was to quit it again, but a second thought made him quicken his pace and come up with them. He knew neither, but one gave him good day as he went, and entering into conversation he proceeded in their company till they reached the bank of the river. There the course of his two companions led them to the right, while his went to the left, for he had already

told them that he was going to Mallington, and leaving them he walked stoutly on till they were out of sight; then seating himself by the bank, he took off his shoes and stockings and washed his feet in the river, looked round to ensure that he was not observed, and taking the thick boots out of his bundle put a stone in each of the light sailor's pumps, and cast them into the water; then once more shouldering his stick he walked on till he reached the little town.

CHAPTER XIX.

We must now return for awhile, dear reader, to notice what took place in the wood where Williams had left his victim, as we have seen. The man lay, apparently quite still, where he had fallen, with his head partly turned on one side, and his hat beaten down till it reached his eyebrows. The back of the hat, indeed, was quite knocked in, for there the blow had fallen, and it was given with tremendous force. His eyes were closed, too, when his assailant walked away, and his hand remained extended, with the little memorandum-book fallen from it on the grass. But as soon as the retreating footsteps became somewhat faint, the eye-lids were slightly raised, then fully lifted, and he gazed down the path which the robber had taken. Williams was still in sight, but was lost the moment after behind the trees; and the traveller lifted his head a little and listened. Then raising himself slowly on his arm, he sat up, and put his hand to his brow, pushing off his hat. A stream of blood from the back of his head, where one of the knotted points of the stick had cut the skin, followed and trickled down his neck, while his eyes rolled somewhat dizzily, and he leaned his cheek upon his hand, as if to give time for his shaken brain to grow steady again. He uttered not a word, however, for several minutes, but once or twice put his left hand up to the spot where he had received the blow, and seemed to feel if there were any serious injury done to the skull. He then rose, first getting on his knees; but he soon sat down again, with a faint look; and, after a little, crawling to the spot where his pocket-book lay, he took it up, and looked over the

contents. None of the notes had been taken, and he murmured, "Thank God, it is no worse! He has got all the guineas, though — the villain! — but I must get back home some how, and have my head looked to. It 's a bad knock, but I think the skull is safe. I wish I could have got a good look at him. It was not that young fellow, Maltby, as he called himself — that 's clear enough, though I fancied so at first. I wonder if I can walk now;" and, rising once more, he kept his feet better, and looked about him.

Gradually as he recovered from the first effects of the blow, and his ideas became more clear and collected, he began to feel a stronger desire to punish his assailant, and to think of the means of doing so. Though a fop of the lower school, and as vain as a nightingale — the reader will perhaps demand apology for this insult to its favourite bird; but let any one in countries where nightingales are plenty, sit, or stand if he likes it better, and watch one singing on a bough, and he will acknowledge the justice of the accusation. — Though as vain as a nightingale, then, Mr. Tobias Gibbs was by no means a coward; and if Williams had met him face to face, although the latter was by far the stronger man of the two, a severe contest would certainly have taken place ere Mr. Gibbs parted with the money of his employers; for that respectable gentleman was the country traveller for a large and wealthy wholesale perfumery house in London. Nevertheless as he knew not by whom he had been attacked, nor how many confederates might be near, he hesitated a little as to his proceedings, and was standing deliberating upon the next step, when an approaching footfall, and the sound of a light air of the day whistled clear and merrily as if proceeding from the lips of some easy-hearted peasant, made him turn round and look the other way. A moment after a man, whom he had seen the evening before at Mallington selling some fruit to Mrs. Pluckrose at the inn, appeared through the trees, walking quietly homeward. He had an honest face — that incomparable gift of nature — but not being of the most observant character in the world, and being engaged with the thoughts of carrots, turnips, greengages, *et cetera*, which to him were as important as the budget at the Treasury, he was passing by Mr. Gibbs with no other remark than "Good after-

noon, Sir," not taking the slightest notice of that gentleman's broken head, crushed hat, or fallen memorandum-book.

"Stay a moment, my good fellow," said the traveller, considering his countenance and feeling himself re-assured by his aspect — "I wish you would help me a little, or, at least let me walk home to Mallington with you, for I have been knocked down."

"Lauk a mercy, Sir, so you have!" cried the man, looking at his head, "and you are all a-bleeding. Why, who the deuce did you find to quarrel with in Wenlock Wood?"

"Nobody!" replied Mr. Tobias Gibbs, "nor did any one quarrel with me."

"They must ha' been poachers, then," said the peasant, interrupting him.

Now, Mr. Gibbs did not see the premises from which this corollary could be deduced; but as he knew it to be false, he did not attempt to refute it logically, and contented himself with replying, "Worse, my good friend — a great deal worse — for he has first broken my head, and then taken my purse."

"Whew!" whistled the countryman, looking around; "How many of them were there?"

"Only one that I saw," answered the traveller, and he went on to relate how he had been walking along, when he received a blow upon the head from behind; how he had fallen, sick and half-stunned, but had clearly felt his pockets rifled, and had revived enough to know that the man went into the bushes again, came back and looked at him, and then walked away."

"What sort of a fellow was he?" asked his new friend. "I know most all the people about these parts."

"I can hardly tell," answered Mr. Gibbs, "for I only got sight of him just as he was going through the trees yonder, and then only saw his head and shoulders. He seemed a tall, stout man, though; but he was gone in a minute."

"Well, the best thing for you, Master," said the peasant, "is to take hold of my arm, and toddle back to Mallington, to have your head looked to. It 's a bad knock as ever I see."

"Oh, that is nothing," answered Mr. Tobias Gibbs. "A

few dressings of Grimsditch's famous vulnerary salve, will set that to rights in two days, and then by rubbing in the genuine Balm of Trinidad for three or four nights, the hair will be restored by magic. But the matter now is to find out some traces of the man that did it. He may have dropped something — forgotten something — for such fellows are always in a twitter, they say — and at all events we shall find his foot-marks somewhere."

"That 's true upon my say so," answered the countryman, "and if you go afore Dr. Western, he 'll ask you all manner of questions. — Ay, the fellow must have lodged in there till you came up," he continued, pointing to the bushes where Williams had concealed himself. "Don't you see, he 's cut a stick out of that thorn? That 's what broke your head, depend on't."

But on entering the sort of den afforded by the trees they found the branch which had been detached by the robber to give room for his arm to strike. The ground on which he had been reclining still bore the impress of his person; but no other trace was to be found there; for the weather had been hot and dry, and the grass was short, showing no mark of the foot that trod it. On coming out again, however, close to where the traveller had fallen, was a footmark in the sandy part of the path, showing the print of a light and neatly-formed shoe, without a heel, while Mr. Gibbs's boot had left another impression easily to be distinguished from the first. They looked around in vain for other marks, till following the path a little farther they found in the sand at the side a fresh print turned towards the spot from whence the blow had been aimed.

"Ay, he came this way across from those trees and the bank," said the countryman. "I should not wonder if he had been harbouring all night in Gammer Mudge's hole."

"What 's that?" demanded Mr. Gibbs, in surprise.

"Why a great hole of a place in the bank," said his companion; "a sort of cave like, where they say one Gammer Mudge, a witch of those times, lived till she was ninety-nine year old; and then the devil came to fetch her."

"It was high time!" replied the traveller. "But there is another mark."

"Ay, and here 's a horse's feet, too," said the countryman. "There has been more of them than one. Stay a bit, I 'll cut two good stout sticks;" and, fixing upon some sapling oaks, he furnished himself and his companion with the only weapons that could be provided.

They then traced the steps both of a man and horse back through the trees to the mouth of the cave, which they approached with extreme caution. The aspect of the place did not at all prepossess Mr. Gibbs with any favourable idea of its tenants; and it was some time before either he or his companion liked to venture in; for there was a projection on one side, which might well have sheltered behind it one or two men, and beyond yawned the dark chasm, the depth of which neither of them knew. At length, however, they mustered resolution sufficient to advance a few steps into the cave; but their search proved no further availing than by discovering the charred wood and ashes of an extinguished fire, by the side of which were lying the bones of a fowl of some kind and a broken porter bottle.

"Ay," said the peasant when he saw these vestiges of a feast; "they are some of those damned gipsies — that 's clear enough."

Mr. Gibbs coincided in this view, for the poor gipsies are sure, in all country neighbourhoods, to come in for their share of suspicion; and a name has hanged many a poor dog that was as innocent as ever lived. "I dare say the fellow was a gipsy," said Mr. Gibbs, "for he had black hair, that I saw."

"Ay, and I have been thinking," said his companion who did not want shrewdness, "that he must have known you or some one was a-coming, for he had been lying there in the bushes for a good while — that 's clear enough — and then, what could he cut away that branch for, unless it were to have a fair whack at your head? If he had made a stick of it, that would have been another affair — but you see, Master, he did nothing but cut it off out of the way, and throw it down."

"That 's true! that 's very true!" exclaimed the traveller, "I did not think of that."

"Did any one know as you were going along here?" asked the countryman.

"Yes, one young gentleman who called himself Maltby," replied Mr. Gibbs.

"Ay! as bad a lad as any in the place," answered the countryman; "I 'll tell you about him as we go along — but, after all, it could not be he who did it himself, for I saw him an hour or more ago walking about in Sturton, and seeming as if he were looking for some one."

"I promised to meet him there at three," said the traveller, "No, it could not be he — that is clear. But I shan't go on now, however."

"No, I wouldn't advise you," replied the other. "What do you think of going on into the cave?"

"No, I thank you," answered Gibbs quickly, "we 've found out all we can, I think, and had better get back to Mallington. So this Maltby is a bad fellow?"

"He is a bad 'un," answered the countryman; and they turned their steps along the path homeward.

CHAPTER XX.

THERE was a snug little tea and card party at Mallington; one of those parties which used constantly to take place amongst small communities like that of the place we speak of between twenty and thirty years ago, where the limited sphere of the society produced that fusion of ranks and classes which many people wish to see further extended. If the surgeon and the lawyer had refused to meet the shopkeeper and the farmer they would have lived almost alone; they could not have enjoyed their rubber. If the shopkeeper and the farmer had excluded the lawyer's clerk or the surgeon's assistant they could have made up but one card table. The necessities of the case sometimes carried the condescension further, and when the Earl of Mallington was down at the hall, the fashionable appearance of his *gentleman*, and the superior knowledge of great life displayed by that personage, as well as certain little considerations of his influence with his lord, caused him occasionally to receive a note of invitation, which he sometimes treated with contempt, sometimes condescended to accept, as the

maggot moved. Then, again, the great expense of Mallington House, and the power of Mrs. Windsor within its walls, rendered her favour worth courting; and Mr. Brown ventured to solicit the honour of her company to one of his *soirées*. The Misses Martin and several others turned up their noses at the housekeeper, and wondered that Mr. Brown could do such a thing; but it was soon found that Mr. Brown's shop gained by the proceeding, and Mr. Green and Miss White and Mrs. Yellowly, together with Messieurs and Mesdames East, West, North, and South, followed his example.

It might be a curious question whether this fusion of classes produced any remarkable improvement, indeed, in the Mallington society. They all met, and they all played at cards, and they all drank tea and ate cakes and bread and butter, it is true; but they all tore one another to pieces with their tongues, if not with their teeth; and, as in most other societies, the grand, though secret, object of meeting seemed to be for every pair to say some ill-natured thing to each other of a third, whose back was turned. *Persiflage* — the gross vulgarity of the great and smart — was, indeed, wanting; for they had no idea of what is called mincing matters. They did not covertly laugh at their neighbours, and in a civil tone either bring out any little fault, or say cutting things with the sweetest look imaginable: no, but they abused each other to their heart's content; sometimes — nay, generally, in secret; but occasionally, when the blood was up, and the tricks and honours were against them, with all the open licence of the card table; for many an odd trick turns up there, reader, besides that which is formed of four pieces of painted paste-board.

It is true that their abuse was not always confined to each other, but was occasionally scattered about with a liberal hand upon their superiors in station or wealth. Thus, when the name of Mrs. Charlton was mentioned, though she was always called a dear sweet creature, quite a lady, and a great number of many other pleasant names in the presence and within the cognizance of Mrs. Windsor, one whispered to another that she was going on at a fine rate, that she would soon get through all she had, and more, too, that she was dreadfully in debt, and that she would not easily

get another old gentleman to marry her and pay her bills for her. During the life of the Earl of Mallington he had come in for his share, but it was in a different way, for his position and his habits removed him so far from the good people of the town (on whose existence and sentiments he never bestowed a thought) that they regarded him with a kind of awe. People will finger very awful things, however, and the great idol of Juggernaut itself would not escape scratching if its worshippers could get at it. The people of Mallington, therefore, though they did not venture to talk about any debts on his Lordship's part, for he had none, did not scruple to affirm sometimes that he was mad, sometimes that he had committed some terrible crime which had driven him melancholy.

The person of all the neighbourhood, however, who was most curiously treated by the small tongues of the place was Dr. Western. During the first two years of his incumbency he had been railed at in the bitterest manner: he was a purse-proud, haughty priest, a pharisee, a wolf in sheep's clothing, everything that is bad; and the dissenting minister of Mallington — for even poor Little Mallington had its share of dissent — aided not a little to cry down the rector; but a strange change had gradually crept over the opinions of the people of the place, and nobody now said a word against Dr. Western, for, in spite of human nature, and the assistance given to it by the devil in resisting all good influences, real excellence and the true practice of Christian virtues will have their effect. Dr. Western knew his flock well, was quite aware of their faults and their failings, laughed at their follies when they were small, reproved and grieved for them when they were great, but was never harsh in his condemnation, or bitter in his satire. He was always ready to aid, to direct, to reclaim, to give hope and consolation, to receive repentance, and to encourage a return to right; he was always performing himself that which he preached to others, and his private fortune as well as his position as a magistrate gave him the opportunity of doing much good, as well as correcting much evil.

It may be asked why such qualities and such circumstances did not produce an earlier effect, but that is very easily explained. Dr. Western's predecessor had been a pluralist, to use an abo-

minably corrupt term, and he had never resided at Mallington. The curate whom he appointed, with a very small salary, was a man of inferior birth and manners, of no higher education than was sufficient to creep unperceived into a black gown, no resources within himself, and that sort of gregarious propensity which leads many a man to seek society very unbefitting from the mere want of any other. He was one at all the card parties of Mallington, hand and glove with every one in the place, took his tea snugly with the Miss Martins, and was even known to smoke a pipe and squeeze a lemon at the Bagpipes. Such things did really take place, dear reader, less than five-and-twenty years ago. Dr. Western, however, had different habits, and as every new thing is judged by its antecedents, his conduct at first gave anything but satisfaction to the people of Mallington. Nevertheless, in course of time, they began to understand, to appreciate, to respect, to reverence, and the worst amongst them in the end did not venture to say that a man whose whole course for fifteen or sixteen years had been consistent in every good and wise thought was aught but what he seemed.

To return from this long digression, however, there was a snug little tea and card party at Mallington, and the conversation of the worthies assembled had received a zest and a fillip from various events which had take place that morning. What a happy and fortunate thing it is for certain classes of society that there are vices and wickedness, accidents, misfortunes, and sorrows, in this good world that we inhabit! What would Mr. Tomkins, and Miss Jenkins, and Mrs. Watkins, and a great number of other people do if it were not for that column in the newspapers which used in former days to be headed "Accidents and Offences?" They would be obliged to remain absolutely silent for one half of their lives; their very thoughts, too, would be still; they would have nothing to talk about or think about; they would lose the two greatest enjoyments of human life — commiseration and horror; they could never shudder at the thought of the man who had had his throat cut on the common, and then go comfortably to bed, after seeing that the door was bolted; they could never blush at Mrs. B — having run away with Mr. A —, and stroke

their chin in the consciousness of not having eloped with anybody. So it is, however, that about a third of the world — I am very moderate in my calculations — pasture their vanity and their selfishness in the wide field of other men's turpitude or misfortune. What a day, then, had it been for Mallington which presented them with the three startling and exciting occurrences of Miss Charlton having fallen into the river, and been drawn out by Mr. Morton; of Alfred Latimer having been tapped on the shoulder by a bailiff, having knocked him down, and galloped away; and, more than all, of an assault and highway robbery having been committed in Wenlock Wood, with the deposition of the injured man, and the examination of witnesses before Dr. Western. If they had imported a pipe of port, and drank it all that night — nay, if a puncheon of neat Cogniac had given spirit to the conversation of the card party, they could not have been more excited or more gratified. Miss Mathilda Martin was quite in a twitter of delight, and Miss Martin, senior, displayed that grave and sententious air which was no less a sign of her internal satisfaction.

"Were you present, Mr. Wheeler?" asked Miss Matilda, to a thin vinegar-nosed man, opposite to her, who officiated as clerk of the parish. "La, how I should like to have been there."

"Yes, Ma'am, it was a very interesting scene," said Mr. Wheeler, in a solemn nasal tone, for he had been clerk so long that his whole conversation was impregnated with "Amen." "A very interesting scene, indeed! Why, we hav'n't had a murder or a highway robbery in this neighbourhood for more than thirty years. The last was when the pedlar was murdered."

"Oh, that was a long time ago; nobody cares about that now," said Miss Martin; "but do tell us all about this business, Wheeler. Was the man much hurt?"

"I can tell you more about that than he can, Miss Martin," said Mr. Nethersole, the surgeon, turning round from the other table, "for I dressed the gentleman's head. It was a bad contused wound on the back part of the cranium, with an aperture in length about half an inch, through which the skull was discernible. There was no fracture, however, nor any depression of the bone, and though some concussion of the cerebellum" —

"Why, bless my heart, Mr. Nethersole," said Mrs. Gibbins, who was his partner at cards. "Why, I declare you have trumped my ace — I wish you would mind what you are about. I declare you never play up to one, whatever one leads."

"My dear Madam, I am very sorry," said the surgeon. "I thought" —

"But who was examined, Mr. Wheeler," said Miss Mathilda, while Mr. Nethersole proceeded to make his apology in due form.

"Oh, a good many people, Ma'am," replied the clerk. "First, the deponent deposed that having made an appointment with young Maltby, to meet him at Sturton" —

"Ay, then it was young Maltby that did it," said Miss Martin; "that 's clear enough. Don't we all know young Maltby?"

"No, he couldn't have done it," said Mr. Wheeler, "for it was proved by Garbet that Maltby was in Sturton at the time waiting for this very Mr. Gibbs. The man who was most suspected was Jack Williams. I dare say you recollect Jack Williams, Miss Martin?"

"To be sure I do," replied the lady; "the nasty vermin owed me four-and-nine pence for neck-handkerchiefs when he went away, but I would have given double the money to see him out of the place, so as he never came back again — that I would."

"Well, he has come back again, sure enough, now," answered Mr. Wheeler, "for I saw him with my own eyes brought up before Dr. Western upon suspicion because he had just come into the town, and changed a five-pound note."

"Well, but they let him off, I heard say!" exclaimed an old lady, with a voice even shriller than Miss Martin's. "I do think that was very foolish of the doctor, anyhow. He might have commanded him for further examination, as they say in the newspaper, and that would have kept him out of harm's way."

"The doctor knows what he 's about Mrs. Green — the doctor knows what he 's about," said Mr. Wheeler, with additional solemnity, for the clerk always looked upon himself as part and parcel of the parson; and in calling the rector foolish he felt that his own wisdom was assailed by Mrs. Green. "Don't you

suppose, Madam," he continued, "that you can tell Dr. Western what he ought to do. Why what did he do? He set Jack Williams up, and made Mr. Gibbs look at him. Now Mr. Gibbs is a very respectable man — a very respectable man, indeed, Mrs. Green, who would not swear to anything that isn't true. So after he had looked at Jack before and behind, and on one side and on t' other, he said he 'd rather not swear, though the back of the head was somewhat like. But the doctor didn't give it up for all that, for he made Garbet describe all the particulars of the footmarks they had found about it in the wood close by where it was done, and he swore that it was the print of a neat-made shoe, without a heel, and no nails in it. Then, Jack Williams had on a pair of thick boots, with nails all round, and two men who had walked with him part of the road came forward, and swore that he had overtaken them coming quite a different way. So what could the doctor do? One of them was Wilson, the tanner's man."

"I 'd have committed him for misprision," said Miss Martin. "Didn't he get out of the gaol at Sturton? There 's always a way of catching these fellows if one has a mind, but the doctor's getting old, and is too kind to them by half."

This observation would have drawn an angry reply upon her head, but Mrs. Green at that moment judiciously remarked, "Three by cards and two by honours, Mr. Wheeler," and this being a matter of much greater importance, the clerk asked to see the last trick.

The conversation was then directed to another branch of "the adventures of a day" by Miss Mathilda Martin observing, "Well, it is funny that Miss Louisa should have fallen into the water the very same day."

Now, though it is very probable that not a single person in the room, if they had been questioned, could have pointed out the funny connexion which Miss Martin, junior, perceived between the accident which had occurred to Miss Charlton in the morning, and the robbery in Wenlock Wood, yet they all followed the cry like a pack of young hounds, and every one had their observation upon the wonderful fact of Mr. Morton having been the person to help the young lady out of the water.

"Ay, I see what will come of it, clear enough," said Miss Mathilda with a titter.

"It 's a great shame if it does," rejoined her elder sister. "Here 's a fellow who comes down without any one knowing him, and puts up at such an inn as the Bagpipes, and spends no money in the place. I 'm sure he 's never changed half a crown with us. It would not surprise me at all if he were of the same gang with you know who. They always have some smart looking person amongst them. I 'm sure what Mrs. Charlton's about I can't think."

"She 's minding her own affairs, Miss Martin," said Mrs. Windsor, over her shoulder, with a tender and significant smile.

"Well, I hope she is," answered Miss Martin, tossing her head, "but every one doesn't think she 's minding them very well; and I hope, if so be as such is the case, nobody will be hurt by it but herself, Ma'am."

"You won't, Miss Martin," said Mrs. Windsor, sharply; and, exasperated by this little altercation, they fell upon the cards, and played away most bitterly.

However, when the game was over, the rubber done, and the great majority of the party were sipping a little negus, Mr. Brown, the proprietor of the new shop which Mrs. Charlton had aided to establish in the village, drew Mrs. Windsor aside, and held a whispering conference with her for two or three minutes. No one heard the whole of what was said; but Mathilda Martin, who sidled up as near to them as she could, and leaned sentimentally over the back of her chair, caught a few words from the adverse dealer to the following effect — "Well, I should take it as a great favour, Mrs. Windsor, if it were only a part — it 's upwards of five hundred pounds now."

"Well, I 'll do my best; but it 's of no use," replied Mrs. Windsor — "but it 's of no use, I can tell you, until quarter-day;" and then perceiving the near approximation to Miss Mathilda's ear, she walked away.

CHAPTER XXI.

Up two pair of stairs, in a small house upon the Kentish side of the river Thames, to which dwelling you entered by a door between an old iron-shop and a rag-warehouse, there was a front room, with bars over the windows. The passage by which the foot of the stairs was reached was long and narrow; and, besides the outer door, was an inner sort of wicket, which was kept always locked. A step or two further in than the wicket was the door of a small room on the left hand side, usually containing a turn up bedstead—an old man, shaved once a fortnight—a young woman, washed not much oftener—and three small children, who generally went without ablution. All the accessories were sallow and sickly; the passage was of no colour but that of dirt, and the fragments of a piece of oilcloth which had once carpeted it only served to make the visitor stumble and well nigh break his neck. The staircase was very narrow, like the passage, and there was a coating of some thick black matter upon the rail of the banisters which had probably been left there by the pressure of many miserable hands.

The room I have mentioned was of a tolerable size, and it, too, had the rags of a carpet over the floor. There were also five chairs, each in a crippled state, more or less, with shattered backs and arms, but sound enough in the legs; and a large old square sofa, covered with chintz, unwashed since the flood, and only wanting one castor, afforded sufficient sitting room for three or four persons.

The chamber, however, at the time I speak of was only tenanted by two; the one occupying the sofa just before the table, the other placed on a chair by its side, with his arm leaning upon the mahogany, and his head upon his hand, with his whole figure cast back in a sort of reckless daring attitude, as if he felt himself perfectly at ease where he was. The expression of the other's features was very different from the careless look of his companion; it was anxious, thoughtful, annoyed, and yet displaying an effort to cast off, or seem to cast off, the load of care.

He leaned back on the sofa, with his head somewhat bent forward, his brow slightly contracted, and his eyes looking out on the face of his companion from under the drooping lids with a steady and eager but thoughtful glance. The whole of the upper part of the face was firm and determined; but about the lips there was a weaker expression, not exactly timid, but hesitating and uncertain; and yet, if one considered his countenance with the eye of a Lavater, the strongly marked jawbone and prominet chin spoke daring courage. Once too, at something the other said, the lips became compressed and rigid, the feebler expression passed away, and all that remained was the look of a quick and moveable character easily excited, and perhaps easily led.

The other was a very different personage. He was short — very short — but remarkably broad set and powerful; his chest was deep and wide, his arms long, and his flanks thin; his brow was high and wide, but the back of the head, though somewhat concealed by a quantity of thin light hair that floated in graceful waves all over it, was as round as a ball, somewhat protuberant above and behind the ears, and large where the base was joined by the thick neck. His features were square cut but fine, the eye soft and somewhat sleepy, beneath the overhanging eyebrow, the upper lip short and beautifully chiseled, but the lower too full, and the chin too prominent. The figure though muscular was spare, and the complexion was pale, as if with that sort of sickness which proceeds from intemperance of some kind, blanching the cheek and hollowing the eye without diminishing the corporeal powers, at least in its earliest stages. The hue of health was upon the cheek of the other, and there was also a great difference in the expression of their two faces. His who sat upon the sofa seemed to speak a quick, restless, impatient, and haughty disposition, somewhat tamed for the time by misfortune or disappointment. It was easily read in all its aspects — except, perhaps, when a darker shade came over it; a look of almost demoniacal fierceness, which gave one the impression of blacker things being within than at first we were willing to imagine.

The expression of the other's countenance was of reckless, heedless carelessness. There seemed no struggle between good

and evil; no hesitation, regret, or care. It was full of perfect self abandonment, and yet there was every now and then a look of keen cunning and sarcastic scorn poured out of the pale blue eyes, like a ray of light finding its way into a dark room from some unknown source.

Between the two stood a bowl of strong brandy punch, to which each helped himself from time to time, without filling the glassful, or drinking it off hastily; but sipping the contents quietly and leisurely, while they conversed. It was evident that they had not met to drink, but drank merely because they had met. Nevertheless, they had thus imperceptibly nearly finished the bowl, and had somewhat heated their own blood, and made their tongues flow fast.

The one tenant of the spunging-house — he who sat upon the sofa — the reader need hardly be told was Alfred Latimer; and the other, who sat near him, was a prisoner whom he had found there when the clear-sighted officials of the sheriff pounced upon him and bore him off, and to whose conversation he had been indebted for several cheerful hours, which might otherwise have been passed drearily enough. But he was indebted to him for nothing else; for, sad to say, the conversation of the debtor's prison, call it by what name you will — Fleet, King's Bench, Whitecross-street, or spunging-house — is full of nought but contamination and evil. Did ever man enter there who did not come forth the worse for its fatal knowledge? First comes degradation, the loss of liberty, and by one's own fault — a stain that never can be wiped away from the mind; and then comes the dark sad companionship with every grade below ourselves in moral debasement; the initiation in all the arts of evading, shifting, plundering. Dark and sad — dark and sad is that companionship, indeed; and during ten days that Alfred Latimer had spent within those walls, one after another, as they had come and gone, the passing companions of the prison had each taught him some lesson of fraud — had each habituated his thoughts to the contemplation of some new vice. But the man who was now beside him had been his constant monitor, had first made him acquainted with the ways of the place, and had after-

wards informed him of a thousand horrible antecedents, which are constantly befalling the men who end in the prison at last. He himself was an epitome of all the faults, follies, and vices — nay, I would say crimes — which can be committed in society without actual punishment; and he had arrived at that state where evil "becomes man's good," and he boasts of the wickedness he has done. The younger brother of a man of station and wealth, he had set out in life in an honourable profession, with powerful friends, and sufficient fortune, but the latter had been soon spent, and the former soon alienated. One vice followed another, and with a combination of headstrong violence and shrewd cunning, he had avenged himself upon the relations and connexions who had abandoned him, both by using their names to procure the means of his own gratification, and by rendering their relationship with him a disgrace to themselves. Through many a long afternoon he had amused his young companion with tales of what he had done in former years; of the duels he had fought, and the honest men he had slain to shield himself from the consequences of other deeds; ay, and of the tricks and devices he had used to make the shot take effect, and to anticipate the fire of his adversary. It was all true, too true, and yet he boasted of it! Then he spoke of those whom he had swindled, and of all the cunning arts he had used to cheat and rob without being detected, or calling on his head the arm of the law; and many a wild adventure and narrow escape was told between, which, seasoned with wit and eloquence, for he possessed both, and gilt with jest and sophistry, for he spared neither, were full of interest to his hearer.

The effect upon the mind of Alfred Latimer was what might be expected. It was not to incline him to follow exactly the same course; for the difference between the two characters marked out a separate path for each; but it was to sweep away every vestige of principle; to make him regard wrong as right; to enable him to shake off the trammels which mere habit so often imposes on men who would be otherwise all that is bad. He went into that foul place, reckless, vehement, full of fiery passions and dangerous weaknesses, but with some hesitations and some doubts. In ten

days his doubts and hesitations were gone; virtue was his scorn, honour was a name, and pleasure of one kind or another was the only good.

He had been telling his companion his circumstances and situation; and, oh! how merrily the other laughed to hear that he had suffered himself to be refused money by a wealthy mother.

"Why, what would you have done?" demanded Alfred Latimer, somewhat ashamed of his ignorance in the eyes of his companion.

"Done!" exclaimed Captain Tankerville. "There were twenty things to be done. Just write a cheque in her name for the money she ought to have given you; or, if you did not like that, supply yourself from the jewel box, or the plate chest. We should always make our relations do what they ought to do — it is a duty we owe them. Or, if you did not like to do that, why not come up to town, and order three or four thousand pounds' worth of things in her name from some of her complaisant tradesmen — have them sent home to your lodging, and transfer them to a fence or a pawnbroker? I could tell you a dozen ways of making fathers and mothers and brothers and uncles perform the duties of relationship against their will;" and again he laughed merrily.

While it was still ringing upon his lip, however, the door opened, and the master of the house put in his head, saying "Mr. Latimer, here is a gentleman wishes to see you," and looking towards the door the young man beheld Mr. Morton coming forward from the top of the stairs.

CHAPTER XXII.

Morton looked round him with an expression of countenance not altogether easy to describe. There was pain in it and surprise; but as his eyes rather wandered over the broken chairs and tables, the tattered carpet, the dirty blinds, and all the other bits of desolation contained in the chamber he was entering, than turned with any feeling of commiseration towards its tenants, it was easy to perceive that his feelings were more general than particular; and in truth he was at that moment asking himself "Does the law

of England really and truly consign miserable wretches who have contracted debts, which — often by the result of accident or misfortune — they cannot pay, to such an abode as this, to be preyed upon by a set of harpies who wring from them all that they have left? The old punishment — if ever there was such a one — of throwing a man into a pit full of serpents, was better than this."

Whatever were his reflections, however, Alfred Latimer started up to receive him with a very different air and manner from those which he usually bore. Both vice and virtue have their confidence: each man, if he be not of a very weak and nervous temperament, acquires a particular sort of courage, in whatever path he chooses to pursue, by the time he has reached a certain point; and the young prisoner had by this time become sufficiently familiarized with his situation to feel not in the least ashamed of it. The most dexterous of pickpockets is self; but he follows a very different course from other gentlemen of his profession, and under his guidance we take our faults and follies out of our own pockets without at all perceiving the theft and put them into other people's; and by this pleasant assistance Alfred Latimer had already laid upon his mother's shoulders the whole blame of his having found his way into a spunging-house — nay, more, of all the consequences that were to flow thence to himself and others. He knew not, he had no notion what he might hereafter do in the way of wickedness; but it was already predetermined in his own mind that, whatever it was would be Mrs. Charlton's fault, from having exposed him to the contamination of such a place and such society.

"Why the devil did she not pay the money?" he asked himself; "and then she would have saved me all this."

Thus, instead of feeling anything like shame at seeing Mr. Morton in such a place and under such circumstances, he never felt more at ease in his life, and advancing towards him, he exclaimed, in a familiar tone, "Ah, Morton! this is very kind of you, to come and see me; for I suppose you are not grabbed yourself; and so that must be your motive."

"That alone," replied the young gentleman, not refusing his proffered hand, but yet not taking it very warmly; "I wish to

have a few minutes' conversation with you, however, when you are at leisure."

"Oh! by-and-by will do," said Mr. Latimer; "come, sit down and take some punch."

"No, I thank you," answered Morton; "I never drink punch. But, by your good leave, I should be glad to speak with you soon, as my time is very short."

"Well, you can speak now," replied Alfred Latimer. "This is only my friend, Captain Tankerville. Captain Tankerville, my friend, Mr. Morton."

Captain Tankerville rose and bowed with a cold air, for it is wonderful how soon men much accustomed to the world contrive to separate the classes of mankind one from the other, the wheat from the chaff, and appropriate to themselves that which may serve their purposes, and none other. In an instant Captain Tankerville perceived that Morton was a man neither to be gulled nor to be led, neither to be his dupe nor his companion. Their repelling poles were instantly exerted against each other, and each felt that there could never be any attraction between them. It was not worth while either to be civil or to be rude, however, and after having received a slight inclination of the head, somewhat haughty and stern indeed, in return for his bow, Alfred's fellow-captive sat down again, resolved not to quit the field without necessity.

Morton cut the matter very short, however, saying "What I have to communicate, Latimer, must be in private; for it refers not only to your own affairs, which you might not care about entering upon before this gentleman; but to those of others, who might not judge such a course expedient. Can we not go into another room? I dare say the man of the house can show us one."

"Oh dear, no!" said Captain Tankerville, rising at this strong hint; "if I am in the way I will beat my retreat. This is Mr. Latimer's sitting-room, Sir; and I will not intrude upon you. Good evening for the present, Latimer;" and he walked towards the door. The young gentleman accompanied him so far, saying something about his conference not being long; and then returned to his friend from Mallington, who by this time had seated himself.

"Well, what news from Mallington, Morton?" asked he, ladling himself out a little of the punch that remained. "I suppose my good mother has heard of this affair — though I did not tell her. After what took place I 'd have died upon prison allowance rather than have written one word to her."

"There you are very wrong," replied Morton, in a grave tone. "Whatever may be Mrs. Charlton's faults, want of affection for you is not amongst them; and it is at her request that I came to town last night, one of the creditors, who has lodged a detainer against you, having written to her on the subject, and shocked her deeply by telling her where you are."

"But has she sent the money?" demanded her excellent son. "What the devil is the use of sending you unless she has sent the money."

"That she could not do," replied Morton, feeling his cheek begin to get a little warm at the perfect heartlessness which the youth displayed; but checking the somewhat sharp words that were springing to his lips. "Mrs. Charlton, in her tenderness for you, and in the distress of mind which your situation occasioned, was induced to lay before me the state of her affairs in a manner which has proved to me, and would prove to you, the utter impossibility of her paying your debts. She has not the money; she has only her jointure, and — nay, do not interrupt me till I have done — and that I am sorry to say has been encumbered very considerably in consequence of her having kept up since Mr. Charlton's death the same establishment which existed during his life. Your debts, it seems, amount to nearly a thousand pounds, and it would require the sacrifice of several years' income for her to pay those and her own also."

Alfred Latimer leaned his head upon his hand, and moved his fingers through his hair, evidently not liking at all the idea of being left, by his mother's incapacity to supply the funds he required, a prisoner for years, if not for life. All his dreams of pleasures and adventures when he should have regained his liberty were put to flight; and after having remained for some moments in silence, he said "Well, then, I suppose I must go into the Bench and get the rules."

Morton purposely made no reply; and the next instant his young companion looked up laughing, as if a new thought had struck him, exclaiming "I'll tell you what, Morton. I have a better plan than that. You get your marriage over with Louisa as soon as possible, and then lend me the money out of her fortune."

"My marriage with Miss Charlton!" said Morton, gravely, and in a tone of surprise, for he had entertained no idea that Alfred Latimer had so completely settled the matter for him in his own mind. "My dear Sir, you are speaking of a matter as determined, which is very far from being so. Doubtless Miss Charlton is worthy of the affection of persons much higher in station and fortune than myself; but"—

"Pooh — pooh, nonsense, Morton," replied Alfred Latimer. "Do you suppose I have not got my eyes? You are in love with Louisa, and Louisa with you, and my mother has made up her mind that you shall marry her; but," he added, after thinking for a moment, "I should not wonder if she made you pay for it. You know Louisa when she is of age can marry any one she likes, with my mother's consent: but if that consent be not given, and she does marry, the whole property goes to my respectable parent, and I don't know her if she does not make whoever does gain her consent come down pretty roundly."

This was a ray of light to Edmund Morton, which served to illuminate at once every dark point in Mrs. Charlton's conduct towards him. The justice of her own son's suspicions struck him at once; but after a moment's thought he felt inclined to reject the very idea as basely injurious to that lady. Nevertheless he had observed much that confirmed it, and had indeed suspected some design in the encouragement he had received, which he had not been able to understand. Art seldom veils itself so completely as to pass altogether undetected, unless the passions or foibles of those on whom it is practised lend it very vigorous aid. Such had not been the case with Morton, for though no man is without some touch of vanity, his was not of that degree or kind which could make him believe that Mrs. Charlton had been so completely fascinated with his good mien or high qualities as to make him her own frequent guest, and her step-daughter's constant companion, without further inquiry, or some secret motive; but to set up her

husband's child for sale to the best bidder was something almost too gross and shameless to be believed. His countenance changed as he listened, and, without replying, he fell into a deep fit of thought.

"Come, come, Morton," said his companion, after indulging him in his reverie for a few minutes; "whatever you may have expected with Louisa, it would be well worth your while to give my mother a good sum — ay, even as much as half her fortune — and the old lady cannot well ask more, I should think. You would then get four thousand a-year at least, and a very beautiful girl into the bargain — ay, and the best girl in all the world too."

Morton listened to him to the end, and then replied quietly, but decidedly, "I think, Latimer, you mistake your mother's views, and I am quite sure that you mistake me altogether. You will find that, whatever may be my feelings, I am not one to make a matter of merchandise of Miss Charlton's hand; and you may depend upon one thing — that, if she ever is my wife at all, it will be with her whole fortune, or with none. But to return to other matters. There is an easier, a more honourable way of relieving you from the difficulties that press upon you, and of delivering you speedily from this place. I informed your mother that I thought I could arrange the matter, and during this morning I have ascertained the fact."

"Ay!" said his companion, "how is that?"

"The money can be borrowed," replied Morton, "on the property which is settled upon you. My solicitor has a client who will advance it."

"Ay, at ten per cent., I suppose," said the youth; "and eat up the whole income with interest."

"No, not so," answered Morton, "at five per cent. I would not meddle with any unfair or usurous transaction, and I have told him to have ready twelve hundred pounds, in case you like to take advantage of the proposal. Then, with all debts paid, you will have somewhat more than two hundred pounds to go on upon, and I trust that with the advantage of your mother's house, and the somewhat severe warning you have received, you will see the necessity of limiting your expenses by your income."

"Whatever I do, you are a capital fellow, Morton," replied Alfred Latimer, "and have set the matter right for me a devil of a deal better than Tankerville would have done with all his wit. He would have had me set these creditors at defiance, take the rules and live jollily upon what I have got."

"Perhaps he might wish to help you to spend it," observed Morton, who thought that such a hint might not be thrown away."

"Take care what you say of him," exclaimed Alfred Latimer, laughing; "he is a fire-eating fellow, and has shot several men upon lighter words than that."

"So I have heard," answered Morton calmly; "but I am not very much afraid of such things, and gentlemen before they fight always take care that the persons whom they so honour are those who are justified in requiring it." His tone and look were perfectly composed, but proud — almost haughty; and Alfred Latimer was a good deal struck with an air which he had never before seen his companion assume. "Were it not so," continued Morton, in a softer manner, "every blackleg and sharper would carry all questions at the pistol's muzzle, and men would be obliged to fight, or be cheated every hour. But what do you say to my suggestion? Does it meet your views?"

"Oh, of course it does," replied Latimer, "and the sooner I am out of this cursed place the better. I declare the room stinks of broken mahogany."

"Rum-punch and cigars," added Morton, with a faint smile. "However, you cannot quit it to-night, I fear. To-morrow we must get you bail for a few days; and then I will leave you to settle the rest with my solicitor, for I have business that calls me back to Mallington."

"What, you have not done sketching the whole neighbourhood?" said Alfred Latimer, with a gay laugh, "but I shall join you there, as soon as all is signed, sealed, and delivered; for I have some sketches to take, too — of objects as pretty — to my eyes at least."

Morton was silent, for the words of Alfred Latimer might have more senses than one; but he could hardly venture to take them in one honourable to the speaker; for he had heard from but too

good authority that at Mallington Mrs. Charlton's son showed a more marked dislike to the society of women in his own rank of life than even to that of men. "God grant," he said at length, somewhat abruptly, "that some honourable attachment may bring and fix you there. It would be the very best thing for you. However, I will direct my solicitor to find you bail, and will be with you about twelve to take you to his office. So good morning to you, Latimer."

They shook hands, and Morton departed, leaving Alfred Latimer standing in the middle of the room, in a deep fit of thought. What was his mind revolving so earnestly? Did he feel grateful for the kindness he received? Was he touched by the interest taken in his fate? Was he busy with good resolutions for the future? Alas! no. His first question to himself was, "Who the devil can this fellow be? He speaks as if he were the Prince of Wales. A poor painter! — I wonder my mother can be such a gull. I should not wonder if he were the son of some rich East Indian, who has smothered a Begum, and brought over her money chests. It 's a capital country that India. One can do very nearly what one likes there, and knock about the black fellows at pleasure. I should like to set up Sultan somewhere, and have a seraglio," and laughing at his own thoughts, he went down to the room below, and called up Tankerville to spend the rest of the night.

CHAPTER XXIII.

In a street not far from the inns of court, though not exactly within their solemn precincts — a little more airy and cheerful than those dark recesses of the law, and not quite so much imbued with the odour of parchment and black gowns, but still smelling strong of red tape and blue bags — are numerous houses inhabited by solicitors, whose doors, like those of a place to which in some respects they bear a considerable resemblance (inasmuch as those who once get into them have a difficulty in getting out again, and are pretty well tormented while they are in) stand ever open to receive the poor sinners whom fate or folly lead to

enter. One of the best houses in this street, and one of the cleanest was number forty-three, about the middle of the row on the right hand; but yet the passage by which one entered would have puzzled OEdipus if the Sphynx had asked when it was washed; and in the midst, just beyond a large door mat, which appeared to have been placed there to prevent people from carrying any of the dirt away with them, there was — nay, there is, for it is impossible it can have been removed — a large black stain of ink which must have been spilt nearly at the same time as the blood of David Rizzio on the floor of sad Holyrood, that storehouse of tragedies. At about ten o'clock on the morning succeeding the day of Morton's visit to Alfred Latimer, a gentleman mounted on a handsome bay horse, very glossy in the skin and full of blood and power — though, by no means a catlike prancer of the parks — stopped at the door of number forty-three, and instantly a groom rode up to take his rein.

Dismounting slowly and thoughtfully he entered the passage, and walked on to a room which had a glass door, with brass rods across the panes, at the end; and opening the said door he found himself in the presence of eight or nine clerks, shut up in boxes or pens. He was not the least abashed, however, and when the head common-law clerk advanced from the stall, with a sweet smile and a low bow, the gentleman only inquired whether Mr. Quatterly had yet arrived?

The clerk assured him that Mr. Quatterly had been there for an hour; and, without more ado, Mr. Morton, for he it was, walked up the stairs, and opened a door on the first floor to the left. Within was another door covered with green baize, impervious to wind and sound, and it also opened under the young gentleman's hand, disclosing a neat and comfortable room within, ornamented with a large table, covered over with innumerable packets of papers, all tied up and labelled; a large book-case, filled with books, in brown calf, all looking so like each other that they might have been taken for one family; and an elderly gentleman, besides sundry chairs and a lamp, the flame of which, like that on Vesta's altar, was kept ever burning by cer-

tain virgins, who lived in the penetralia of the temple. We will pass over the chairs, and of the book-case and the table we have said enough; but with regard to the elderly gentleman we must have a word or two more, for he was worthy remark to any one, and we may have to relate some of his proceedings hereafter. It is of his person, however, that we have now to speak. Mr. Quatterly, or, as his letters generally bore his style and title, Timothy Quatterly, Esquire, had passed his meridian by several years, being now fifty-eight, if not fifty-nine. To see him sitting one would have said he was six foot high; to see him standing one soon perceived that he was not more than five foot seven. The upper part was large, round, and bulky; the lower part minute enough to make an almost ludicrous contrast with the rest. Nature, in fact, having been called in a hurry from South America, had brought the super-structure of an unfinished Patagonian with her, and lighting down in Lapland had clapped it on to the legs of a dwarf. This disproportion, as we shall soon have to show, affected both mind and body; but first let us look at his face, reader. See how round, and smooth, and almost soft it seems, with its rosy cheeks and its little nose. Gibbon himself, notwithstanding Madame de Deffand's terrible mistake, had never such a pair of cheeks as that; and then those merry little twinkling black eyes, with something both of high manly sagacity in them and of childlike fun, how they peep out from under the thin eyebrows. You see he is as bald, too, as a haddock, except just over the ears, and in the fat back of his neck, where the gray hair flows away in a pigtail. He is a stout man, too — rather too stout, inclined to be a little corpulent, yet active, too — as active as a trout. Then his clothing is somewhat peculiar: a black coat powdered on the collar, a neckerchief as white as snow — one every morning, upon my word; a white waistcoat without a speck, though somewhat yellowish from London washing; but those drab knee breeches, and those grey worsted stockings! — surely that is not in keeping, Mr. Quatterly. But perhaps he may consider his legs unworthy of their trunk, and treat them accordingly; or is it that from their littleness he regards them more tenderly, and wraps them in all that is warmest. That is probably the right

solution of the enigma; and I declare the man has got a pair of silver buckles in his small shoes.

Such was, such is Timothy Quatterly, Esq., in outward appearance; and in mind there are peculiarities also. That large head contains a vast quantity of law, and a good deal of mirth—gay, simple, almost infantine fun. There is shrewd good sense, too, within. He is not a man to be taken in, to be cheated, bamboozled, done; and yet he is as good-humoured a creature as any upon earth — ay, and benevolent too, notwithstanding his being a lawyer. In fact, he is a *lusus naturæ;* for, what with erudition, law, merriment, good-nature, kindness of heart, keenness of mind, activity, shoulders, and legs, there is quite enough of him to make two men, and very tolerable men too.

But he was somewhat wayward in his whims; and though he could occasionally show that he was possessed of wit that would have shamed many a practised compounder of smart sayings, yet he was fond of a pun — barbarously fond of a pun; and let it be remarked that we use the word barbarously discreetly, and with due reverence; for though no barbarians that have ever yet been heard of were known to love that peculiar sort of tea-and-toast witticism called a pun, being always very sedate and serious people, and much more reasonable than civilised nations, yet they have a spice of cruelty in them, and so had Mr. Quatterly; for no sooner did he discover that any pompous and magniloquent man, who fancied his grave sayings were worthy of profound attention, hated a pun, especially uttered by another man, than he set upon him, and with an overpowering torrent of the abhorred jest overwhelmed his stories, broke through his arguments, swamped his conclusions, and turned all his eloquence to farce. There was no resisting him, for resistance only increased his cruelty and his fluency. With other persons he was more moderate; and in conversation with any one who did not rouse the spirit of perversity within him, but smiled at even a stale jest, or far-fetched illustration, he would be tender-hearted, and content himself with shadowing forth his meaning, when he did not choose to speak it plainly, with many a nursery rhyme, or school-boy joke, always brought in quaintly, and sometimes, in its very

simplicity, judiciously. Thus there seemed two parts in his mind as well as in his body — one full of power, activity, and vigour, erudite, keen, perspicuous, and resolute; the other playful, gay, malicious, and full of fun, but, like his little legs, carrying all the rest lightly over various slippery and uneven paths.

Such was the gentleman in whose presence Mr. Morton now appeared, and when the latter entered the room Mr. Quatterly was sitting with the worsted stocking on his right leg crossed over the knee of the drab breeches on his left leg, his indicial digit of the dexter hand rubbing a spot upon the top of his head, which, if not more bald, was at least more polished than the rest, and, looking steadily at the shagreen case of a pair of spectacles which lay upon the table before him.

"Ah! good morning, Sir; good morning," he said, as soon as he beheld Morton, whom, for various reasons to himself best known, he treated with great respect, at the same time rising and putting a chair for him, though, as he moved about with a light step, he seemed so top-heavy that it was hardly possible not to think every moment that he would topple over.

"Be seated, my dear Sir, be seated. What news of his Majesty's country seat in Surrey? You saw your lost mutton, I suppose, last night. Pray, did you find him shorn to your hand, as, according to all rules — and those of the King's Bench, especially — he ought to be, though the fleece of those who get in there one would think were hardly worth plucking."

"There are always persons quite ready, my dear Sir," replied Morton, with a smile, "to gather up the gleanings that more legitimate husbandmen have let fall."

"A cut at the lawyers! A cut at the lawyers, Sir," cried Mr. Quatterly, "that 's unkind; that 's unfair. '*Nemo repente fuit turpissimus.*' It takes five years to make an attorney, hey? I know what you mean. But, pray do not call us all husbandmen. I have nothing of the husband in me, though I think I know some one who has; — ha! ha! ha! — ha! ha! ha! — ha! ha! ha!"

There was a merriment, a joviality in his laugh that was not to be resisted; and Morton joined in somewhat more quietly, adding, as soon as the cachinnation of the lawyer would allow of

his being heard — "But, my good friend, have you got the deed prepared as far as possible, for I would fain have it settled at once."

"Settled!" said the solicitor, "he is thinking of the settlements already. How these young men's wits do get inflamed with matrimony as soon as the spark is blown into a blaze — that 's not a pun, mind you — it 's a fine flight of imagination beautifully expressed; for though you may be a spark, and a gay spark too, yet you have not shown yourself easily fanned into the necessary state of combustion."

"But an answer, an answer, my dear Sir," said Morton; "have you got these deeds, or this deed ready, as far as may be, for I much wish to carry the young man out of the temptations of London as soon as may be."

"Pooh! leave him alone, and he 'll come home, and most likely bring a fat tail behind him," answered the lawyer, having recourse to one of his favourite illustrations. "The temptations of London! Did ever one hear a sane man talk of such things. I never found any temptation in London. All mine have been in the country. By the way, I hope you have thought of me this year. I must have a pop at the birds, and you, or your late good father, have always provided me."

"Oh, yes!" replied Morton, "you shall have enough. Come down to me at Mallington, and I will give you enough to do."

"To draw the settlement, hey?" cried Mr. Quatterly with a new burst of laughter; "but from what I hear, you have already bagged the best of the game there before the season, you poacher. But I 'll come, and if I leave you a single cock pheasant my name 's not Quatterly. Can draw the settlements after dinner, fall asleep over them, send them up to Bell, get an opinion that nobody on earth can read, and leave a whole generation of law-suits for the benefit of my clerks and their children. Must take care of the poor boys in the office, you know. But come, I see you are impatient. Now to business. What does the young fellow say? That is the first question. I have known young dogs so fond of

that kennel, that nothing would get them out of it, and there is no use of drawing deeds unless one is sure they will be signed."

"But, my dear Sir, I told you I was sure," replied Morton, in a tone of vexation at the idea of the matter being no farther advanced than it was the night before; "he will sign it willingly — he was transported at the very idea."

"No, no, no — not transported yet!" cried Mr. Quatterly; "soon may be for aught you or I know. He 's on the high road, it would seem; and taking the high road is one step to transportation, if not to the gallows. He 's in a spunging-house, I think you said. No fear of his not being well cleaned out, then, and fit for whitewashing. Had he got any one with him? — a poor parson who had spent too much in gin-and-water, and seven children, or anything of that sort; or a maiden lady of nine-and-thirty, who had been ruined by lawyers and *sal volatile*? Those are the sort of companions that make a man transported to get out."

"No, indeed," answered Morton; "he had with him one Captain Tankerville, a very dangerous person, I believe. Was he not once brought up on suspicion of forgery?"

"Oh, the villain!" cried Mr. Quatterly; "if he 's in, it is, indeed, high time to get the other out. If he carried in with him a single virtue, or a half-crown piece, that fellow will pick his pocket of it. But to set your mind at ease, I sat up last night for half an hour, and drew up a little memorandum, as good as a deed, which one of the clerks is just now writing out. It will be done before twelve, and you can pack him up in a hamper as soon as it is signed, and send him off to Mallington by the night coach, taking care to put him in head foremost, and write upon the top, 'Keep this side up!' It is his only chance of having his brain turned right again."

"But, my good friend, we must contrive to get bail for him before I can bring him here," said Morton.

"Why, bail him yourself, or bring him in the sheriff's custody," said Mr. Quatterly. "My name will make them all compliance; but, I forgot — your mystery — your mystery! — and, methinks, you forgot too. If you come with him here, you will have your name shouted from clerk to clerk to split the welkin.

That will never do. Let me see;" and turning to a book with two brass clasps, he read: "Mr. Twistleton at eleven — Johnny Dunmow at three — Sir Arthur Mc More at half-past. Well, I can go to him at half-past eleven, for Twistleton only wants to borrow fifteen thousand pounds on a mortgage in the moon. That 's a property easily conveyed, so he will not keep me long, and then I can go to the lad myself. You can meet me there, for he might prove refractory about leaving me to settle with the creditors, and then, as in the ring, it is as well to have a backer."

"But he cannot get out without the creditors being paid, or having security," replied Morton.

"Oh, people get out wonderfully," answered Mr. Quatterly; "and as to security, there is nothing so safe as a hackney-coach and a ten pound note, though one sometimes breaks down, and the others turn out forged. However, it is as well not to bail him at all, for then he must either both sign and pay, or remain where he is — but you will never get your money, I can tell you; or, at all events, not the interest, for his mother has the property for life, and till she assigns it to him his signature is not worth one of those old buckles;" and he stretched out his foot, a little pleased at its neat appearance.

"The loss will not be great," replied Morton, in a well-satisfied tone, "and I shall be well satisfied if we succeed in rescuing him."

"And winning the fair lady," added Mr. Quatterly. "Well, Tommy Tucker turned a Turk for twopence; and, after all, it 's a much more sensible thing to turn tomfool for a pretty girl — though, doubtless, the said Thomas Tucker, who turned Turk as aforesaid, looked to have a reversionary interest in certain Circassians of which his convertor was seized and possessed, as well as the mere consideration money of twopence of lawful money of Great Britain — anything hereinbefore contained to the contrary notwithstanding — and so good-bye till a quarter to twelve."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ALFRED LATIMER and his dear new-found friend, Captain Tankerville, sat at their breakfast at about eleven o'clock, and the table was covered in a way that the drawing-room of the spunging-house seldom saw. What a curious sensation that very collocation "drawing-room — of a spunging-house" gives. Perhaps nothing on earth brings forth the painful points in any painful subject more than when some image is accidentally combined with it to which we have been accustomed to attach ideas of pleasure. The drawing-room of a spunging-house! The drawing-room of a prison! The place where we have been accustomed to spend pleasant hours, to which we retire from care and business and anxiety, to enjoy our allotted portion of relaxation with those most dear to us, in which we have seen ourselves surrounded by children and friends and happy faces — the name of that place connected with a prison! — with suffering and sorrow, and want and captivity! What a contrast in that strange combination! However, there they sat at a meal which certainly did not consist of ordinary prisoners' fare; for the money which Latimer had got for his horse was not yet gone; and with the true spirit of his class of men, he thought that as he was soon to be free, and have somewhat more than two hundred pounds in his pocket, it mattered not how speedily the sum he had was spent. He had therefore invited Captain Tankerville to breakfast, and had ordered and paid for all sorts of things — broiled ham and fish, coffee and tea, muffins and rolls, sweatmeats and honey. The Cerberus of the house, at the first mention of his wants and wishes, had divined, from long experience, that the gentleman who had visited his prisoner the night before had come to announce his speedy liberation, and consequently determined to make the most of his time. He got everything that was required, therefore, with great promptitude, and charged him three times the value for all. Never were such dear eggs set down upon a table; never did York or Westphalia produce such extravagant ham; never did a fishmonger ask such a price for fish. But it was then, and is in a degree now, a part of

the law of England that all its officials should have a privilege of skinning the unfortunate, and trading in the follies of the foolish. It may be a good part of the law, but I do not see the morality thereof quite clearly.

However, there they sat, laughing and talking, jesting and jeering, enjoying themselves as if folly and crime were the merriest things in the world. How different was the scene from that which I remember once having beheld when I went to visit a poor friend in one of those dens of horror and iniquity. He was a high and noble-minded man of talent and imagination — unfortunate, but neither vicious nor foolish; and I never shall forget the haggard and despairing look of his countenance as he sat there solitary and silent, taken from his wife and children, deprived of the means of earning the very sum that was necessary to pay a hard creditor. What was the cause why he could not be as gay as Alfred Latimer and Captain Tankerville? It is explained in a moment. He was brought there by no fault of his own — they were. He had been arrested at the suit of a surgeon for long attendance on a sick child, which he had been unable to pay because other people could not pay him. This was his crime — none other upon earth. Thou art a hard thing, O Law of England, and in thy justice are often marvellously unjust — in thine equity iniquitous. The cunning rogue sets thee at defiance; but honest poverty is a crime that cannot escape thee.

Alfred Latimer had told his evil counsellor almost all that had taken place between him and Mr. Morton. He had not, indeed, told all, for Louisa's name had never been mentioned. There was something so pure, so sweet, so good in the very idea of the sister of his boyhood that, bad as he was, and hardened as he was growing, he shrunk from the very mention of her existence in the presence of one whom he instinctively felt to be coarse in mind and gross in habit of thought. However sweetly the cup of wickedness may be seasoned, however eagerly the thirsty lip of passion may drink it, there is always a trembling consciousness that there is poison in the draught, and although Alfred Latimer listened with a sort of fascination to his companion's tales, and

yielded his whole spirit to his influence, he nevertheless felt that he was base even while he prepared to imitate him in baseness.

"So," said Captain Tankerville, with the slightest possible sneer upon his lip, "this Mr. Morton, it seems, wants to take you back and tie you to your mother's apron string again. If I were you, I wouldn't go; I 'd stop here in London as soon as I had got the money, if it were only just to show them that they couldn't make a baby or a fool of me any more."

"So I should," answered Alfred Latimer laughing, "but I have other things that draw me to Mallington besides my mother's apron string. I 've got some business to do there, Captain; but as soon as that is done I shall come back again."

"Well, I wish to Heaven," said Captain Tankerville, "that while you are getting this money you would get fifty pounds for me. I can pay you in three months, but in the meantime it 's a great bore to be kept in for thirty pounds all that time."

"Oh, I 'll lend you the fifty pounds," replied Alfred Latimer, "for there will be more than two hundred after paying all my debts, which I am to have to start me again."

"You are a devilish good fellow, Latimer," said his companion, "and I 'm very much obliged to you; so much obliged, indeed, that I 'll just give you a hint which you may take or not as you like; but it is what I would do myself if I were you. Here you are to get twelve hundred pounds. It is nobody's giving to you, or I suppose you would consider yourself bound in honour to do with it as the giver proposed; but it is raised upon your own property, and so it is your own, therefore you may do what you like with it. Now, Timson, the officer, tells me that all the detainers against you do not amount to two hundred pounds, and if I were you I 'd just pay them off, put the other thousand in my pocket, and take a start for the continent, and let the rest of the scoundrels who have bills against me whistle for the money. Beyond doubt they have cheated you out of two-thirds of the amount, and I 'd see them all — before I paid them."

"Oh, they have cheated me enough, I know," said Alfred Latimer, "and what you propose isn't a bad plan. I could easily

run down from Mallington to Southampton," he continued, musing, "and get over to Havre."

"To be sure you could," answered Captain Tankerville. "I did it once myself three or four years ago. Instead of going over to Calais, where I thought they would be on the look out for me, I went round to Southampton and got clear off. The fact was I had been called out by Green, of the Dragoons. He was a devilish good shot, I knew, and so was I. Now I, being the man called out, had by right the first fire; but my fool of a second gave that up, as they are getting into the habit of doing, and agreed that we should fire together. Both Green and I looked out sharply for the word; and I am sure enough that we should both have gone head over heels together, but somehow or another I fired just half a second first, before the word was well out of Fitzherbert's mouth. I suppose I was a little nervous" — and he laughed with a low, unpleasant, meaning laugh. "However, they swore that I had fired before my time, and as Green was as dead as a door nail it was expedient that I should take myself off as fast as possible. The two seconds, however, kept their own counsel, thanks to the law, which makes the seconds principals if the matter is brought in murder, so the affair was hushed up, but the two fools would never speak to me afterwards, just as if I were going to stand still and be shot through the head. Green would not have gone a bit the less for that, so it was just as well to take care of myself."

What might have been Alfred Latimer's reply to this very honest and candid communication of his companion's views of the code of honour cannot be told; for just as the other brought it to a conclusion, the Cerberus came up announcing Mr. Quatterly; and the young gentleman had just time to ask "Who the devil 's he?" and Captain Tankerville to give him an admonition to stick fast to his plan, when the large head and shoulders of the worthy solicitor appeared, with the little legs walking busily underneath them. He looked at Captain Tankerville with a sardonic grin, his small black eyes sparkling unpleasantly, and the corners of his capacious mouth turning down.

"Ah, Captain!" he said, "you here? You 've changed your

lodging I see — you 're right, you 're right — 'To fresh fields and pastures new.'"

"Of course I did not come here willingly, Sir," replied Captain Tankerville, "but I shall soon be out, that 's one comfort."

"No, no, no," said Mr. Quatterly, "it may be a *come forth*, but not a *comfort*, surely — and he laughed at his abominable pun — "but stay where you are, stay where you are. The Surrey side is best. Better air, even in King's-bench-walk than Horse-monger-lane, Captain."

"Sir, do you intend to insult me?" asked the other, with his brow darkening; "if so I shall know" —

"No, no, not at all," replied Mr. Quatterly, "not at all, Captain. I 'm a great coward; I never fight — I 'm too big to fight; I never fought but once, and that was with my fists. Didn't mean anything unpleasant, on my life; but you know the place where one last sees a man naturally recurs to one's mind when next we meet him. You know my way, and how I rattle on, and you should only laugh at it — 'The little dog laughed, you know, to see such sport, though the dish ran away with the spoon.' But this is Mr. Latimer, I suppose. Sir, my business is with you."

"Well, then, Latimer, I will not interrupt your business with this person," said Captain Tankerville, with a very savage air; and he walked out of the room, finding the presence of Mr. Quatterly by no means a relaxation.

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried the good solicitor, walking into a chair, for it could hardly be called sitting down, his legs being too short to bend much in the operation. "Ha! ha! ha! Well, Mr. Latimer, adversity does make us acquainted with strange bed-fellows. But to business, Sir. I wait upon you at the desire of a client of mine, Edward Wilmot, Esq., and another client of mine, Mr. Morton. The one has a sum of money to lend, the other has requested that it may be lent to you. He has explained the nature of the security; and as the deed cannot be properly drawn up for some time, I have brought a little memorandum of agreement which will serve the purpose in the interim, being unwilling to keep you in such a place, and amongst such a set of

scamps a moment longer than is necessary. I thought I should find Mr. Morton here.

He then proceeded to inform Mr. Alfred Latimer of the particulars of the arrangement, and Mr. Latimer, in turn, commenced inquiries directed to find out how Mr. Quatterly intended to pay the money. That gentleman, however, at once informed him that it would be requisite to pay all the detaining creditors in the first place, and then to discharge the bills of all the others, a list of which had been obtained from Mrs. Charlton, to whom they had all at various times applied concerning her son's debts. "That done," he said, "he would hand over the balance to Mr. Latimer, receiving his signature of the memorandum, which he laid before him for his perusal.

Alfred Latimer, however, demurred to the payment of his debts by any other hands but his own, saying, "You do not think I should like to be arrested again, I suppose."

"Oh dear, no!" replied Mr. Quatterly; "not at all, not at all. Can have no objection at all to your paying them yourself; but you know, my dear Sir, the detainers must be discharged, or you cannot get out."

"Yes, I know that," answered the young man; "but it would look as if I could not be trusted, if I were to have any one else pay the rest of the people but myself."

"Very true — so it would, so it would," said the solicitor, who perfectly saw through the whole manœuvre, and suspected who had prompted it. "Well, we will pay the detaining creditors first, and then leave you to settle with the others. But the sheriff's office must first be searched, you know, to see what are lodged; and we may as well have that done while we are waiting for Morton. I will go and send the man below to do it," and with his usual rapidity he walked out, and closed the door behind him.

"Be so good," he said, as soon as he got into the den below, and had closed that door too, "to send round as fast as possible to all those persons named in that list, and tell them, with my compliments, to lodge detainers against Alfred Latimer, Esq., for the amount of their bills before one o'clock, or they won't be paid. Then, at half-past one search the office, and come up and

report. Don't go to the people yourself, that would not be regular. Send some one you can trust. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Quatterly," replied the man, winking his left eye, "I twig," and the solicitor, leaving the paper in his hands, returned to the young gentleman above, and entered into pleasant conversation with him.

"Airy here!" he said, looking out of the window; "airy, Mr. Latimer; and, doubtless, good society."

"Why you do not seem to think the only society I have got very pleasant," replied the other, "at least if one may judge by the way you spoke to Captain Tankerville."

"No offence meant, I can assure you, Sir," replied the lawyer; "he has been twice accused of swindling, it is true, and once of forgery — all through a mistake, no doubt — all through a mistake; but, nevertheless, character is a very funny thing. It is very like a certain gentleman mentioned in history, and named Humpty Dumpty, about whom there is this legend: —

'Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty got a great fall;
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Cannot set Humpty Dumpty where he was again.'

And so it is with a man's reputation, Mr. Latimer. It takes a great many horses and a great many men to set up a character once fallen; friable materials, Sir — friable materials — easily cracked, and not easily mended."

Mr. Quatterly meant well, very well; and had Alfred Latimer been, as he supposed, a young man standing on the brink of evil, his observations would have been as well directed as they were meant; but there is a particular point of moral degradation where the sight of the dark gulf into which vice plunges man is more dangerous than serviceable, and that is when they are in it. They then see no means of escape — no path to re-ascend, and in despair seek in the abyss a deeper depth. Perhaps, the only way to recover them at all is to blindfold them to the dangers of their situation, lest their heads turn, and let hope lead them out by the hand.

Such was the state of Alfred Latimer. He knew more of his own conduct than the man who spoke, and his only reflection was, "Well, then, there is no use of trying. I 'm in for it, and must go on."

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, Mr. Morton was ushered in, and shook hands both with him and Mr. Quatterly. After a few minutes had passed in conversation of no great moment, the solicitor seemed to grow somewhat impatient, and inquired if Mr. Latimer knew the amount of debts already appearing against him in the sheriff's office?

The young gentleman answered boldly about two hundred pounds.

Mr. Quatterly replied, "Oh! if that is all, I have money enough at my banker's to give cheques for the amount; if it had been much more I must have gone home to get it. But this fellow is so long that I do not know what to do; I shall be too late for my next appointment."

Morton, who was well aware that the solicitor was one of the most wealthy of a wealthy tribe, was not a little surprised to hear him speak of having about two hundred pounds at his banker's, but, judging that there was some cause, he answered, "Perhaps you had better go to your appointment, my good Sir, and return with the amount."

"Well, perhaps, I had," said Mr. Quatterly; "and I shall certainly return with *a mount* if I have to climb these dreadful stairs again. It will be better, too," he continued, looking at Morton, "because Mr. Latimer wishes to pay all the other bills himself."

"Indeed!" said Morton, gravely. "I thought you intended to return to Mallington at once, Latimer?"

"And so I do," replied the young gentleman sharply; "but I intend to stay a day in town first. There is no objection to that, I suppose."

"I have no right to object, though I am sorry for it," answered Morton gravely — for he had his doubts of what might become of the money if Alfred Latimer retained it in his own possession for even a day in London.

"A letter, Sir," said a dirty-faced, sallow-gowned maid, putting a note into Mr. Latimer's hands; "eightpence, if you please." Those were days when penny postage had not been invented, and Alfred Latimer, paying the postage without further inquiry, except how the letter came to be so late, which was explained by the fact of its having gone to his former lodging, looked at the back as if the handwriting was strange to him.

Mr. Quatterly at the same time took his departure, saying he would soon be back, and Morton walked to the window to leave his companion to read the epistle he had just received, at his ease. The contents, whatever they were, seemed to produce a strange change in Alfred Latimer, for, after having vented an oath, and the exclamation, "That she shan't by —!" he began to walk up and down the room in a state of great agitation."

"I say, Morton," he continued after a pause; "that d—d coach does not start till nine, I think. Would you mind joining me in a chaise down?"

"I cannot wait till to-morrow," replied his companion, "otherwise I should be very happy."

"Ay, but I have changed my mind," said Alfred Latimer; "I shall go down to-day as soon as this fellow returns. What a time he is! Why, he could have looked over all the offices in London before this! Do you mind starting at once?"

"Oh, no," replied Morton a little embarrassed; "I must, indeed, go home for an hour, but I will rejoin you in that time with a chaise, if you like."

"Well, do, do, there 's a good fellow;" cried Alfred Latimer. "You can go and get ready at once if that 's all. I and old Squatterly can settle all the rest, while you are away, and I 'll pack up my things in the meanwhile."

Morton smiled almost sadly; for he could conceive no very good motive which could have operated so sudden a change in a man of Alfred Latimer's disposition; but, agreeing to his proposal, he took his departure, and left him alone. The moment he was gone the young gentleman hurried to his dirty bedchamber, laid out the few articles of clothing he had purchased in London since his arrival, and those he had packed up at Malling-

ton ere he left his mother's house, and placed them in a portmanteau, which he had brought from the lodgings where he had been arrested. In the meanwhile Captain Tankerville, as soon as he saw Morton depart, walked out of the room below, and into that where he had left Alfred Latimer; but not finding him there he made some inquiries of the people in the back parlour from whom he learned that Mr. Quatterly was expected back every minute. This intelligence drove him into his own den again, where he amused himself for three-quarters of an hour by practising some very ingenious and serviceable tricks with a pack of cards.

At the end of that time, there was a knock at the street door, and he heard the voice of the sheriff's-officer speaking to his man as they entered together, almost immediately succeeded by another knock and the tones of Mr. Quatterly. The sheriff's-officer and the solicitor then walked upstairs together, and Mr. Latimer was called out of his bed-room.

Now, the officer was a very different personage from his man; a very tall, thin, neat personage, in a blue satin cravat, tied tight, and his voice was sweet and complacent. "Happy to hear it 's all arranged, Mr. Latimer," he said, "I have been down to search the office, and find a few little matters lodged this morning. Let me see, I 'll just run them up;" and, sitting down, he soon made out an account amounting to nine hundred and seventy-five pounds, which, with costs, charges, &c., swelled the whole to about one thousand and nine.

Alfred Latimer gazed with astonishment. "Why, Tankerville told me, Mr. Quincy," he said, "that there was but two hundred."

"Ay, Sir, that was the day before yesterday," replied the officer. "These have come in since," and he ran his finger down a long list at the bottom of a paper he held in his hand."

"It does not matter, you know, my dear Mr. Latimer," observed Mr. Quatterly, putting on a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles. "As they were all to be paid, it is better to get it all over at once. Save you trouble, you know, and be sooner done. There are few men who ever, like the man in the moon, come

down too soon to find their way to Norwich; and you 'll have more time to amuse yourself, if you do stay in London till to-morrow."

"I am going down at once, Sir," said Alfred Latimer, in a sullen tone; "Mr. Morton is to bring a chaise directly."

"Ay, a sensible man, Mr. Morton," rejoined Mr. Quatterly, "a very sensible, excellent man, indeed. Few like him, Sir — few like him. He has but one fault that I know of."

"And pray what may that be?" asked Alfred Latimer, dully, looking over the papers on the table.

"He hates a pun," answered the solicitor, in a serious tone. "But now, Mr. Quincy, to business."

And that business was soon settled; the bills were paid in full by Mr. Quatterly; the costs in part, for he thought fit to dock some excessive charges; and the sheriff's-officer knew his character too well to make aught but faint resistance in his own case, and contented himself with Mr. Quatterly's engagement to pay the rest of the amount, if it could be legally enforced in the case of others.

When all this was settled, the worthy solicitor turned to Mr. Latimer, saying, "And now, Sir, there 's the chaise, I hear. Morton is the most punctual man on earth; always to the tick of the clock, and yet never goes tick either. And now, Mr. Latimer, after the little expenses of the agreement, &c., there is a sum due to you of one hundred and — let me see — call it one hundred and ninety pounds — we can settle any other little matter afterwards. Will you have it in money or a cheque?"

"All in money," answered Alfred Latimer; and Mr. Quatterly's pocket-book instantly disgorged the amount. Morton was in the room a moment after; and though there was a little anger in Alfred Latimer's heart at being frustrated in his hopes of receiving the larger sum, with which he had already built castles enough in the air to have held a whole generation, yet he was even more eager than ever to return to Mallington without a moment's delay; and as soon as it was announced that he was free, he descended the stairs, and sprang into the chaise, without giving one thought or one word to Captain Tankerville. Such are the friendships of the bad. The other saw him depart from the win-

dow, and clenching his fist, with a fearful oath, he exclaimed, "The blackguard has bilked me; but curse me if I don't do for him some day."

CHAPTER XXV.

The conversation of Morton, as they rolled along, did Alfred Latimer more good than that of Mr. Quatterly had done. Although, as we have hitherto seen him, he had shown himself somewhat grave, for there had been many thoughts and feelings of deep interest in his heart and mind; and deep thought, as well as deep feeling, is always grave, yet he was by no means constitutionally a sad or sombre man. He was one of great powers of imagination; but those powers were disposed quite as often to exercise themselves on gay as on serious subjects when they presented themselves naturally, and he seldom thought it worth while to seek for anything that did not come naturally. He was not either the creature of impulse or of the moment. He was always the same; but his mind dealt with things as he found them, subjecting all to the influence of itself, but still not putting forth its strength to throw a snow ball as it would have heaved a rock; nor sporting with the tangles of Nærea's hair, as if he had been solving a problem in Euclid. There was ever, indeed, in his gayest of moods somewhat of thought, which showed that the stream ran deep beneath the ripple, and in his most serious moments somewhat of fancy, which evinced that the present cares had brighter aspirations beyond them.

In the present instance, indeed, he deviated from his ordinary course; and though from much that had passed he had received a grave — nay a sad impression, yet he strove to be cheerful, and to force his thoughts from painful realities and very dark anticipations, to the less stern and gloomy objects that the passing scene presented. And what a city is London for every suggestion that the mind of man can desire — whether for bright and cheerful, or for shadowy and desponding — with its life and activity, its eagerness, and its intense worldliness; its fierce passions, and its light absurdities; its marvellous selfishness, and its still more surpri-

sing benevolence. There never was anything — nay, not in Greece or Rome, nor even in those wide deserted eastern plains, that once were the nest of cities thronged with life — anything so wonderful as that great capital, in the strangeness of its contrasts; and yet, by what fine and beautiful gradations — by what a magical softening of semi-tints, the strong lights and the dark shades blend into each other.

For three or four miles the journey of the travellers lay through the metropolis; first through that portion called the City, where the eternal roll of wheels, and the everlasting movement of interminable crowds deafened the ear and dazzled the eye; and yet never did the result of that extraordinary combination of habit and of reason, of law and of will, of good feeling and of self-interest, which forms the great constraining bond of society, appear more conspicuous in order and propriety. There might be things to shock the eye, or to offend the ear — there might be inconveniences, quarrels, impediments; but still the human tide flowed on in cheerfulness and regularity, still one made way for another, still the savage in man's heart was overruled by the silent inert power of the multitude, and the selfish eagerness of the few gave way to the sense of the many.

After that the chaise rolled on through what is termed the more fashionable part of the town, and the very desertion of the streets at that period of the year showed that the travellers had entered a quarter where another spirit reigned. Long rows of houses with closed shutters — squares with scarcely an inhabitant remaining in them (but some old servant left to keep the mansion in order, or some woman put in by an upholsterer, with scanty payment eked out by the advantage of lodging) presented themselves as they went on. But even here were gradations marking the narrow limits of fashion. First came the streets of shops, not nearly so gay or so thronged as in a more propitious time of the year; the equipages thundering no more along the pavement, the footway uncrowded, and many of the master tradesmen themselves absent on some of those expeditions to the sea side, which have made foreigners believe that the English citizen, like the anchovy, will not keep without pickling: then the abodes of the higher classes, utterly

vacant, or if not so, with blinds drawn down, and every sign of absence, in the pitiful vanity of being afraid of doing what others do not do: then the mixed atmosphere, where the little ape the great — affecting their follies without being able to imitate their better qualities, and striving to follow them in magnificence without having the means of equalling them in expense: and lastly the suburbs, where unaspiring mediocrity goes on in humbler walks, content with envying and decrying that which they can never attain.

On all and each of these scenes Morton had something to remark, and though his companion was somewhat silent and morose, he persevered in trying to lead him to reason and to think, believing that exercise of mind is one of the best remedies for mental maladies, as exercise of the limbs is for those of the body. Nor was he altogether unsuccessful; for after having remained sullen for some time, Alfred Latimer began to converse; and if not very reasonably, yet the effect was so far good that it weaned him from the angry feelings which he had been indulging in regard to the disappointment he had experienced. His conversation, it is true, was restrained; for Morton and he had few subjects in common, and he was also unwilling to let the other behold any part of what was passing in the deeper chamber of the heart. He felt as if he were playing a game with a skilful adversary, and must not let him see his cards — that sad, that fatal mistake, which all who are carried away by their passions make, of regarding the most friendly hand that would arrest the horses that are running away with them to destruction, as that of an enemy. And Morton was certainly playing a game, but it was not against Alfred Latimer; it was against his bad passions and his evil habits; but they were those which the young man thought fit to look upon as his friends; and if it be necessary in the wide world to choose our friends well and wisely, it is still more necessary so to choose our friends from amongst the tenants of our own hearts.

"It is strange," said Morton, as they rolled through the crowded streets of the City, "and yet beautiful as strange, that if one could trace each of the multitude that is passing by us, and examine his fate and history, we should find as a general result that the cheerful and happy face, the light and easy heart, is the

property of one who has his passions and his conduct under due control."

"I do not know that at all," answered Latimer, "we find plenty of very good people who are very miserable."

"Not long, and not often," answered Morton; "of course I mean in the aggregate. It is undoubtedly true that sorrows and misfortunes do affect the best, and from that very fact one author of great talent, but no very strong religious feelings — I mean Voltaire — has drawn an inference of a future state where there shall be compensation for such suffering; he calls it unmerited suffering, but I will not use that term, for what man can say that he has not deserved punishment? but yet, when griefs and anxieties do fall upon the good, how much more easily do they bear them, with how much more resignation and calmness than the wicked."

"I do not see why that should be," answered Alfred Latimer; "if I were a good man, and I never pretend to anything of the kind, I should only be the more angry and indignant at being punished for no offence."

"That is not the usual course of human nature, Latimer," replied Morton. "We always bear chastisement that we have deserved more impatiently than that which we have not."

"But I do not see that you have any cause to judge from all these people's faces that the good are a bit happier than the bad," rejoined his companion; "look at that fellow there, coming along with such a dark, eager look, as if he would cut everybody's throat that stopped him. Now, from his dress and his manner, and from the low bow which that shopkeeper is making him, I would bet any money he is some rich merchant or man upon change, with his pockets full of gold, and everything on earth that he can desire."

"Not improbable," replied Morton; "he looks very much the sort of man you have described.

"Well, then, I am sure he does not look happy," rejoined Alfred Latimer.

"Most likely he is quite the reverse," said Morton, with a smile; "but that is quite consistent with what I said. It was, that those who are the happiest — ay, and who generally look the

happiest too — are those who have their passions under due control. Now, a man may have everything on earth he can desire, as you say, and yet be rendered miserable by not having his passions under due control. For aught we know, that very merchant or banker, or whatever he is, may have the passion for wealth upon him to such an extent as to be as much or more a vice than the love of women or the dice-box is to others. I spoke of all passions, not of one or two; and one of the great mistakes that the world in general makes is to select a certain class of vices from the many as the objects of reprobation and punishment. We are full of conventionalities, which render us more tolerant to some classes of evil — ay, even to greater or more heinous crimes — than others. Some are even the objects of praise and approbation; and many, very many vices, as society is constituted, are the sure roads to worldly prosperity — but, mark, I do not say to happiness; that is a very different thing. What is a greater vice than the greed of gold? Not the honest desire of independence, not the honourable effort to rise by genius, industry, and perseverance; but I look upon that man who devotes his whole soul to the accumulation of wealth, who stints and wears down the inferior drudges who aid him in its acquisition that he may have the greater share, who refuses to open his hand or his heart to misery and want, or only undraws his purse for the world's applause — even if he commit no fraud, no deceit, to gain his ends — I look upon that man, I say, as more vicious than the libertine who frequents the abode of harlots. Yet to him the world gives its smile, which it denies to the other; but are either of them happy, Latimer? No, believe me, happiness is of a higher nature than to be attained by the mere gratification of desire."

Alfred Latimer relapsed into silence. His companion's reasoning did not convince him; for he had never formed to himself any other idea of happiness than the indulgence of passion and the satisfaction of his wishes, nor could he form any conception of it. But he had found, notwithstanding, that even where he had had the power of attaining that which he believed to be all that he wanted, it had not produced content. It had either been followed by inconvenience and punishment, or by some new thirst for some

new gratification; and Morton's words served, at least, to show him that there were other sorts of happiness than any he had dreamed of, and he mused over the suggestion, assailed by thoughts to which he would not give admission.

At length, however, the observations of the solicitor came back to his memory, and he drew from them a long train of reasonings in his own mind, all tending to confirm him in the course he was determined to pursue. "It is never any use," he said suddenly, "for any man who has once taken a way for himself different from what the world call right, to seek to change it; for, as that Mr. What's-his-name remarked, no man can ever get himself into good repute again; and even were that possible, he would himself always have a hankering after the things in which he had indulged himself, which would get the better of him sooner or later."

"Oh dear, no!" exclaimed Morton, laughing; "if that were the case I am afraid half of our young men in England would only go on from bad to worse all their lives. Few in the unbridled days of youth do not commit many errors, and fall into many follies. Many, very many, even in more mature years fall before some overpowering temptation; but God forbid that either the one or the other should shut us out from all return. It is only against the man who wilfully and deliberately chooses the wrong course as that which he is determined to follow that the door can be said to be closed. For every other there is always an opportunity of retreading his steps — of abandoning evil, and seeking right. He may have to struggle against habit as well as passion, that is true. It is a natural consequence of his faults, and, if he thinks rightly, a well-deserved punishment; but there is something to be set against that, well calculated to strengthen him to resist the influence of habit. Passion itself is tamed as he goes on in life — reason becomes mature — experience is gained, and is a great teacher. Then, as to what was said by Mr. Quatterly, if you mean him, I think you must have mistaken him. He could only allude to persons who, by some base and dishonourable action, had deprived themselves for ever of the esteem of honest men. Follies, vices, even crimes, have often been repented of, and

atoned; but knavery argues a perversion both of heart and understanding, which I never yet heard of being remedied."

Alfred Latimer fell into thought again. He asked himself, perhaps, if he were in that position, and he might feel that if he had not all the symptoms of the disease, he had at least caught the infection. The reflection was not pleasant to him; but yet he indulged it till it became too oppressive to bear, and then casting it off he roused himself to converse on anything else. He talked of the country, spoke of his eagerness to get back to Mallington, of shooting and hunting — even of the county ball. But Morton clearly saw that it was all effort, and that if amusements in which he did take pleasure had their share in the topics he discussed, the greater part were those for which he had never displayed any taste. Nevertheless, he indulged him in not pressing any graver thoughts upon his attention; not because he feared to be tedious, or to be thought a sermonizer and a bore, but because he was sure it would do no good, and only rouse a spirit of resistance against his influence which would do evil.

Thus passed the time till night began to fall. The sunset was magnificent, and they had full opportunity of observing it, for they were just then crossing a wild elevated common, where frequent sudden and precipitous falls of the ground at the distance of only a few yards from the high road, showed them a wide extended scene to westward, with long lines of blue shadow and bright light crossing the country, and the glowing sky of evening beyond. All in that quarter was clear, with the exception of some dark blue films drawn across the burning horizon; but to the south large rounded clouds were rising, heavy, and leaden, as if a thunderstorm were at hand. Yet ere the travellers had crossed the common, and before the sun had completely sunk, the sharp defined edges had softened off; and the clouds rapidly advancing spread half over the sky. About two miles farther on there was a change of horses, and by this time it was dark, with a few drops of rain beginning to fall. The post-boys were long in bringing out the horses, and Alfred Latimer was all impatience to get on; so that when Morton proposed to have lights, saying that the man would hardly be able to see, the young gentleman replied, "Oh,

d—n it, no; do not let us wait for that. It is but ten miles to Mallington, and he ought to know his way in the dark."

On they went, then, with the rain falling fast, the sky quite covered with clouds, the sun down, and the moon far below the horizon. It was as dark as pitch; not a ray of light served to guide them, and the very road was hardly to be distinguished from the grass beside it, the drenching torrent having changed its colour from a light yellow to a dark brown. The storm pelted against the windows, and rattled upon the top of the chaise, and large drops of water found their way in through the crevices, rendering even the inside no very comfortable abode. Still the postillion rode on in his jacket, either following the invariable custom of his fellows never to put on a great coat till they are wet through; or fearing to leave his horses, one of which was somewhat unmanageable, in order to get at it. At length, going on at a furious rate for little more than an hour, they reached Mallington-common, and there, apparently thinking that as they had nearly arrived at the end of their journey, it might be as well to protect himself from the storm, the driver stopped and got down.

Instantly Alfred Latimer thrust his head out of the window, demanding "What the devil are you stopping for now? You are just at Mallington. Go on to the inn."

"I 'll only just get my great coat, Sir," replied the driver, and at the same moment he advanced towards the splinter-bar.

The young gentleman swore a loud oath, and whether the horses heard it and did not approve of it — or took it for an intimation to go on — or, not having any great coats to put on, did not choose to wait for another person's convenience, they started off at once, broke from a trot into a canter, and from a canter to a gallop.

Morton sat calmly back in the carriage without moving hand or foot; but Alfred Latimer exclaimed aloud "Confusion and the devil! they will break our necks down the hill, or have us into the river. By — they are off the road! They will be into the gravel-pit. I will jump out."

But before he could execute his purpose or Morton could beseech him to desist, the chaise received a violent jerk, then

plunged forward, leaning to one side as the near fore-wheel went over a bank, then rolled over and over, with a terrible crash, and at length fell on its side, and lay with something striking hard against the front panels, like the feet of a horse in agony.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"LATIMER!" said Morton, raising himself partly in the carriage, with great pain, for he was severely bruised. But Alfred Latimer made no reply; and, putting his arm through the broken window, his companion opened the door of the carriage and got out. The darkness was profound, the rain falling in torrents, and it was impossible to see anything but the dark outline of a steep bank, down which the chaise had rolled, the vehicle itself, nearly broken to pieces, and the two horses, one lying perfectly still, the other still kicking in the traces, but more and more faintly every moment. A sound, however, was heard above, as of some one running, and Morton raised his voice and shouted aloud. At first he was not heard, for the man ran on, but he called again, and then the post-boy answered from the bank above, exclaiming "Good Heaven? where are you, Sir?"

"Here at the bottom of the bank," answered Morton; "Mr. Latimer is much hurt. Run on as fast as possible to Mallington House, bring down several of the men, and a large chair or board, and lights. Lose not a moment; but bid them not alarm Mrs. Charlton till we ascertain the truth. Be quick, be quick!"

The man ran off again, knowing that he could render no assistance, even to his horses — the especial objects of his care — without the means of seeing where they were; and Morton remained by the side of the vehicle, judging that it would be inexpedient to make any effort to move his companion without assistance. He himself felt that though, as I have said, severely bruised, especially about the head and right shoulder, he was not seriously injured, and tying a handkerchief round his hand, which had been cut by the glass, he leaned over the chaise, and tried to discover how Latimer was lying. A moment after he

heard a step, and then a voice exclaiming "Did not some one halloo out just now? Who 's there?"

"We have been overturned into the pit," answered Morton. "Is there any place nearer than Mallington where we can get help, my friend? for Mr. Latimer here is much hurt, if not dead."

"The devil he is!" cried the man, who had now come near, and seemed, as far as the darkness would allow Morton to judge, to be a stout-built short man; "that 's a bad job indeed. But we 'll get help very soon from Widow Brown's cottage; 't is but a stone's throw. I 'll be back directly."

"Bring a light," said Morton, "if you can get a lantern."

"Ay, ay, Sir," answered the man, and away he ran, seeming to know every step of the ground thoroughly. In five minutes, or not much more, the gentleman who remained by the chaise saw a dim spark like a will-o'-the-wisp, moving at a little distance, and then heard voices; and then, coming on through the rain, with their figures becoming more distinctly visible by the light of a horn lantern which one of them carried, he perceived two men and a woman. They did not, indeed, seem of a very prepossessing appearance, by the yellow glare that fell upon their countenances when they approached; but no aid was to be refused at such a moment; and he found that, with good forethought, one of the men had brought a large rug, such as are used in that part of the country for the bed coverings of the poorer classes, in which to move the gentleman who had been most injured.

The first thing to be done, however, was to ascertain his exact condition, and, taking the lantern from the hand of the man who carried it, Morton held it into the chaise, and by its light discovered Alfred Latimer lying just where he had fallen, with a good deal of blood about his face. His hand was still round one of the holders in the inside of the vehicle, and his companion could perceive that the fingers seemed every now and then to tighten and then relax their grasp.

While he was making these observations, one of the men said in a low voice to the other "That horse that 's under is as dead as a stone, and this has broke his fore leg right through. It would be better to cut his throat at once."

"Here, d—n the horses! lend a hand to make this rug into a sort of hammock, to carry Mr. Latimer up to the cottage," said the other man. "Is he living or dead, Sir?" he continued, addressing Morton; "let us have a look. I 'll soon tell you. I 've seen many a dead man in my day."

"He is living," answered Morton, "and I trust only stunned. Cut that strap which keeps the door from going further back, and then, if one goes to the top and another kneels on the side, we can lift him out without shaking him much."

The men obeyed him readily, while the woman — a tall gaunt, hard-featured dame of sixty-five — held the lantern; and Morton, bending down into the chaise, got one arm under his companion's shoulders, lifting him gradually, while the man who was lying flat on the side of the vehicle, supported part of the weight, and the other at the top guarded his head with his hands, to prevent it striking against the wood work. He was thus speedily drawn out of the broken chaise, and seated by the side, with Morton supporting his head upon his arm. He groaned twice or thrice while this was taking place, and it was now evident to all that he still breathed without much oppression.

"Now, Sir, let us carry him to the cottage, and lay him flat down on a bed," said the short sailor-like man, who formed one of the party; that 's the best thing for him till the doctor can be fetched."

"It would be better to carry him home at once," replied Morton; "Mallington House cannot be far, if I judge rightly where we are."

"It 's more nor a mile, and that a good un," said the woman.

"Besides, the cottage is just in the way," rejoined the man; he can be moved after the doctor comes, if he thinks it safe. I don't think he 's so much hurt, after all."

"If the house be as far as that, the cottage will be best," replied Morton; "but I thought this pit was close to Mallington?"

"You 're thinking of what we call the first pit," replied the other man; "this is the third — Mother Brown's pit some people call it, don't they, mother?"

Alfred Latimer was then placed in the rug, which by this time

had been gathered together with twine at the two ends, and the woman going before with the lantern, the two men carried him forward along a little path — which was scarcely traceable along the bottom of the gravel pit — to the entrance by which carts were commonly brought in. The party then issued out upon the common, but they had not reached the higher ground when two or three lights were seen coming a little to the right and a horse's feet were heard upon the road.

"Here are the people from Mallington House," said Morton.

"Ay, and that 's the doctor's horse," rejoined the woman; "I 'd know his trot among a thousand — I 'll give him a call:" and raising her voice to an unearthly shriek, she shouted "Hie! Doctor, Doctor! Dr. Nethersole!"

The horse's feet were checked in an instant, and as they paused they soon saw the worthy surgeon, who was a little in advance of the party from the house, leading his horse carefully across towards the spot where he perceived their light.

"Goodness, gracious, Sir! this is a sad affair," said Mr. Nethersole, as soon as he saw Morton, with his face somewhat cut. "You seem to be much hurt yourself. But how is Mr. Latimer? Is he dead?" he continued, gazing anxiously at the burden carried by the two men.

"No," answered Morton; "he is not dead. That, at least is certain, but he is quite insensible; though whether the injuries he has received be really serious or not I have no means of judging. These good people say there is a cottage near, where he can be taken. Will it be better to go thither or to proceed to Mallington House?"

"Oh! to the cottage — to the cottage, on every account," said Mr. Nethersole. "In the first place, in these cases no time is to be lost; and in the next place Mrs. Charlton, who is luckily out at dinner with the Markhams, would be dreadfully shocked if she arrived just as her son was being brought in in such a state."

According to Mr. Nethersole's desire, the men proceeded at once to the cottage, which lay in a little nook of the common, not a hundred yards further on; and the young gentleman having been laid on a bed in the back room of the lower story, the sur-

geon proeeeded to examine him, while the room became gradually crowded with servants and other people from Mallington. Morton stood near while the surgeon pursued his investigation, and gave him every aid in his power while he felt the head, traced the position and line of the limbs, and ascertained that no fracture had taken place; but he could not, even while thus occupied, avoid hearing the remarks of several of the inhabitants of Mallington who had come up with the servants of the house, in regard to the general character of Mother Brown, as she was called, her son, and their associates; but, although this was quite as unprepossessing as the personal appearance of the widow herself, yet it was of course a secondary consideration to Latimer's safety.

Mr. Nethersole, after due perquisitions and a little touch of medical mystery, declared that no bones were broken, but that, though the skull was not fractured, yet he feared concussion of the brain had taken place, for which bleeding would be immediately necessary, and, after that, perfect quiet. It was quite out of the question, therefore, he said, to remove the young gentleman to Mallington, as, if done in the first instance, venesection might come too late, and if attempted afterwards, fever might be superinduced. After this oration — for when in the actual exercise of his functions Mr. Nethersole, who was at other times somewhat taciturn in the presence of those whom he considered his superiors, became oratorical — he ordered the young gentleman to be undressed, and placed in the bed where he lay. He then bled him somewhat largely, and the effect was certainly such as he could have desired, for, as the blood flowed, Alfred Latimer drew two or three deep sighs, opened his eyes, and looked about him.

Mr. Nethersole placed his finger on his lip, saying "Not a word, my dear Sir. Lie perfectly still; take no notice of anything; open not your mouth, or I will not answer for the consequences. Let the room be cleared, and open that window. Now one of the servants must stay with the young gentleman till I can return. I will sit up with him myself to watch the symptoms as they appear; but he must not be left while I am necessarily absent for an hour or an hour and a half. Here, Wilkinson, you

are the very man. Sit by Mr. Latimer till I return; do not let him speak or move till I come back; and you, Widow Brown, keep the house quite quiet. No gossiping, no talking, no drinking and squabbling, remember. I know you all, you know; and I will have my orders obeyed."

Widow or Mother Brown promised compliance in a very humble tone; for Mr. Nethersole, or "the doctor," as he was called, was a very important personage with her class, being in reality a very humane man to the poor, and acting on many occasions as medical attendant, as almoner, and as father confessor, all in one, for a very small remuneration. After having given these directions, and seen the room disencumbered of the crowd, who all departed except Morton — some into the neighbouring chamber, some on their way home — the surgeon again sat down by the sick man's side, felt his pulse, nodded with a well-satisfied look, and then rose, saying in an oracular tone, "The circulation greatly relieved. I will be back soon, my dear Sir, and bring something to compose you. Now, Mr. Morton, if you like we had better walk back to Mallington; I think you will need a little attention yourself, and the fewer persons round Mr. Latimer the better."

"Very well," replied Mr. Morton; and, bending down, he added "Good by, for the present, Latimer; I will see you early to-morrow."

"Why, what the devil is all this about, Morton?" asked Alfred Latimer; "I have broke my head somehow."

But Mr. Nethersole instantly interfered, holding up his finger with a grave look, and saying "Not a word, not a word, as you value your life. Come, Mr. Morton, come; our presence but excites him," and, walking out with the young gentleman, he gave some further directions to the servant Wilkinson, and they issued forth upon the common.

Morton's first question was in regard to Mr. Nethersole's real opinion of Alfred Latimer's situation; but who ever got a direct answer from a medical man? However, he made out sufficient from the cloud of pros and cons in which the surgeon enveloped his opinion, that he did not see any very dangerous symptoms at

that time, but that the young gentleman having decidedly received a slight concussion of the brain might at any moment during the next three or four days become suddenly worse, and that he could by no means say that the result might not be fatal, though he at present saw no reason to anticipate such a catastrophe. Mr. Nethersole would then have fain ascertained exactly how the accident had occurred, remembering duly that he had an account to render to all the old ladies of Mallington. But Morton, in the first place, thought fit to satisfy himself as to what was the state of affairs at Mallington House, inquiring whether Mr. Nethersole could tell at what hour Mrs. Charlton would return, and whether there was any chance of the news being carried to her where she was dining?"

"No," answered the surgeon, promptly, "the man you sent acted with great discretion I find; for on hearing that Mrs. Charlton was out — what a sweet creature she is! don't you think so, Mr. Morton? — he made two men servants come down with him to me, without going in at all, lest Miss Charlton should by some means hear of the event and be frightened out of her life."

"Then Miss Charlton did not go with Mrs. Charlton?" asked Morton.

"No, my dear Sir; she declined," answered the surgeon. "You know the young gentleman there has been rather particular in his attentions, and people do say that he is not very agreeable to the young lady — ha, ha, ha! — you understand."

"Perfectly," replied Morton, drily; "but I think, Mr. Nethersole, it might be as well if I were to go in as we pass Mallington House and give Miss Charlton the first news of Mr. Latimer's situation myself. She can afterwards break it to his mother in a more gentle manner than any man could do."

The surgeon agreed fully that such a plan was a very proper one, as he would, indeed, have pronounced any to be that Mr. Morton suggested; but, perhaps, in this instance, he had some faint notion that the young gentleman might wish to have five minutes of Miss Charlton's company alone, and that she might not object to grant it; for he had remarked various looks and words at Dr. Western's, on the day after Louisa's rescue from the stream,

which let him more into the secret of her heart than she either wished or imagined. Whatever were Morton's private thoughts, however — and, like the private thoughts and motives of all other men, they were, doubtless, of a very mingled character — they walked straight up to the gates of Mallington House; and there, while Mr. Nethersole was urging his young companion to come down to him as soon as his conference with Miss Charlton was over, and have his own injuries examined, all their plans were disarranged by the rush up of Mrs. Charlton's carriage, and by her instant recognition of the two gentlemen as the butler came forth with a light to open the gates in answer to their summons.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Ah, Mr. Morton, is that you?" cried Mrs. Charlton, letting down the carriage window; "come in — pray come in."

The carriage dashed on up to the house; and though the distance from the gate to the door was not more than twenty or thirty yards on that side of the mansion, the lady had descended from her vehicle, tripped into the house, and walked somewhat more slowly up stairs before Morton and Mr. Nethersole arrived. The latter gentleman, understanding that, in the changed circumstances of the case, he would not be one too many; and thinking that if Mrs. Charlton were by any chance to faint at the tidings of her son's situation, his assistance might be necessary; and, like the Barber of Bagdad, having his lancet ready, and his bandages in his pocket, he judged that he might as well walk in with the young gentleman, and take his share of things to come.

Morton advanced first, however, with a grave air, and asked the butler if he had said anything to his mistress regarding the accident.

"No, Sir," replied the man; "she asked why I came out to open the gates; and I only replied, because Wilkinson was out. I thought you could tell her better than I could, Sir."

It was a task, however, that Morton could gladly have dispensed with, for he was neither fond of inflicting nor of witness-

ing pain; but, nevertheless, fortifying his mind for the undertaking, he proceeded slowly up the stairs, followed closely by Mr. Nethersole, and entered the drawing-room, the door of which Mrs. Charlton had left open behind her. That lady was standing in a graceful attitude, with her hand leaning on a table, and the tips of her still beautiful fingers a little bent back, while a sweet and courteous smile illumined her countenance, and welcomed Mr. Morton before he appeared. Louisa, who had exchanged a few words with her step-mother, was seated on a sofa, with a table and book before her, and her lovely face, too, was raised towards the door, with a look of well-pleased expectation — ay, and something more than expectation; for there was a light in her deep eyes that let one see beyond them to her heart far more than she intended; the light of Love, beaming from two as sweet lamps as ever he kindled. The moment, however, that Morton appeared, with the blood still upon his face, and his hand tied up, her cheek turned deadly pale. She spoke not a word — indeed, she could not speak, but she rose at once, and then feeling her knees tremble caught the arm of the sofa for support. She knew how she loved him then, if she had never fully known it before.

Mrs. Charlton, on her part, uttered a pretty little scream, very musical in its tone, and exclaimed, "Good Heaven! Mr. Morton, what has happened? You have met with some accident! You are hurt!"

"Very little, my dear Madam," replied the young gentleman; "indeed, scarcely at all. My face has been scratched with some broken glass, and my hand cut; but we have every reason to be most thankful that the accident was not worse, for it might well have proved fatal to myself and my companion, instead of inflicting a few wounds and bruises, which will be well in a few days."

He managed his communication skilfully, for he at once communicated that he had a companion, and that he also had been injured, without at first telling Mrs. Charlton that that companion was her son, or informing her of the extent to which he had been hurt. The sound of his voice, and the firm tone in which he spoke,

comforted Louisa a good deal; but still she felt very faint, and she sat down again, not at all sure how long she could stand.

Now, Mrs. Charlton was alarmed too, for she was very quick in the combination of her ideas; and there were three distinct facts before her, from which, after putting them together, she drew a deduction very near the truth. There was Mr. Morton hurt, and suffering from an accident; he acknowledged having a companion in misadventure; and that companion was not now with him. From all these certainties she deduced that his companion had been her son; and that he was more hurt than Mr. Morton. If that gentleman had nothing of very great importance to communicate, he would not have thus presented himself at Mallington House, she thought, till he had washed his face and hands. If her son had been able he would have come with him. Her son was unable, and that was the important fact Morton came to communicate. All this passed through her mind in a moment, and she felt very much alarmed, as I have said; but Mrs. Charlton was not a woman to faint. It was a thing that she never did; and this was certainly not an occasion on which she would have commenced the practice. She was very fond of her son, it is true, and, as the reader has seen, she had spoiled and indulged him very greatly in youth. But it was not for his sake she had done so, it was for her own. She loved him as her right hand, or her right eye, because he was a part of herself; and, perhaps, she would sooner have lost her right hand or her right eye than him, if she could have done so without any pain or danger. Limb against son she would not have hesitated, I think; but it suffering — personal suffering, or risk — were thrown into the scale of mutilation, I 'm afraid Alfred Latimer would have had but a poor chance.

She did not faint, therefore, or feel any inclination to do so; but yet she was anxious and frightened, and her countenance showed it.

"Speak, my dear Sir! — speak, Mr. Morton," she said, "you have more to tell — Alfred was with you, is it not so? Alfred is hurt? — very much hurt? — tell me the truth, my dear friend. I can bear it."

The last were nearly the same words which she had used when the servant ran in to inform her that her first husband had destroyed himself; and she did bear it with wonderful philosophy.

Morton had an instinctive perception that in this instance he might speak without much further circumlocution as far as Mrs. Charlton was concerned; but he did not forget that Louisa was in the room, and he was sure that though she neither loved nor esteemed Alfred Latimer, she would feel even more shocked and pained by the intelligence that was to be told than his mother. He answered, then, in a manner to remove anxiety as far as possible without deviating from truth.

"He is much better, my dear Mrs. Charlton," he said; "he was apparently a good deal hurt at first, but he recovered wonderfully as soon as our skilful friend here, Mr. Nethersole, bled him. There are no bones broken, happily, though he was for a time stunned by the fall."

"Thank God!" cried Mrs. Charlton; and Louisa echoed her words with truer devotion.

The surgeon advanced to play his part; for, during the short dialogue which had taken place Morton had purposely put himself forward fearing that Mr. Nethersole might so overload his account with medical terms that the two ladies might be left in ignorance of whether Alfred Latimer were dead or alive. That worthy gentleman now proceeded to justify his caution by explaining to Mrs. Charlton, in the darkest possible manner, the situation of her son, and what he had at first apprehended, as well as what was now to be guarded against. For aught that the mother could gather from this communication Alfred might have been a marmalade; but Morton stepped in to her help, saying "I see you do not exactly understand Mr. Nethersole. It is merely that Latimer was at first stunned and speechless, but has now quite recovered both his speech and his senses; and though our good friend thinks it would be imprudent to remove him from the cottage to which he was at first taken, in order to give him time to recover completely, yet there is no great chance of any danger resulting from the accident. Is it not so, Mr. Nethersole?"

"Precisely, Sir," replied the surgeon; and Mrs. Charlton, sinking into a chair, gazed in Morton's face, thinking what she ought to do next.

"I should very much like to go to him," she said, after a moment's pause; "but the carriage has gone away, I fear, and" —

"It rains dreadfully," said Mr. Nethersole, finishing Mrs. Charlton's sentence nearly as she would have finished it herself. "Do not think of it, my dear Madam. I will stay with him all night. I propose to return immediately."

"I do not see any necessity for your going," added Morton; "for he is so much better that I doubt not a few hours will remove all chance of danger, and Mr. Nethersole particularly recommends quiet. One of your servants — Wilkinson, I think, is his name — is with your son. Mr. Nethersole will be in attendance; and if he should be worse you can be sent for."

"Thank you, Mr. Morton — thank you," said Mrs. Charlton; "you are very kind to me in every respect — kinder than any one of my own relations, I am sure. Here, you have undertaken this journey, and been in peril of your life, all on my account; and how I can ever be grateful enough I cannot tell. But pray let me hear how this accident has happened, and what it was, for I know nothing but that you have both been hurt."

"I beg pardon for interferfering," said Mr. Nethersole, with a smile, "but I must really here exert my authority as a disciple of Galen. Mr. Morton is hurt, Mrs. Charlton. He does not yet know how much — we none of us know how much — for he has given himself up entirely to Mr. Latimer, and has taken no care of himself whatever."

Louisa, who, as the reader has remarked, had not spoken a word, raised her eyes to Morton's face with a look of tenderness and admiration, mingled with fear, as if imploring him, for her sake, to attend to his own safety; but Mr. Nethersole went on — "He is wet through and through, too, so that it is high time that he should go home, change his dress, and then allow me to inquire into the injuries he has received. Wounds and bruises, apparently slight at first, are often the most dangerous if not at-

tended do. Before he gives any account of what has taken place, then, I say authoritatively, let him go home."

"Home!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, in a fit of enthusiasm; "can Mr. Morton have any home in Mallington but this house, after all that he has done for its inmates. I will take no refusal, Mr. Morton; ring the bell, Louisa, my love — the yellow room will be ready in a moment."

Louisa rang without an instant's delay, and as Morton was excusing himself on account of having no change of dress there, saying that his portmanteau had been left with the chaise on the common, she joined her all-persuading voice, exclaiming, "Oh! do, Mr. Morton. Clothes can be soon got from the inn."

"Well, I must obey," answered Morton, with a smile, and as the butler entered, Mrs. Charlton exclaimed, "Tell Windsor to have the yellow room got ready for Mr. Morton directly."

"And send down to the inn for what Mr. Morton wants," added Louisa, for the first time giving any orders in her own house.

"I think your portmanteau is here, Sir," said the butler; "I told the gardener to bring everything out of the chaise, for Widow Brown and her people are not to be trusted where they can pilfer."

"You are a wise and prudent man," said Mr. Nethersole; "they are, indeed, not the most honest set in the world; but have Mr. Morton's things taken up, and while the room is getting ready I can examine how far he is hurt, in the dressing room. I know it — I will show you the way."

"I am really not hurt at all," replied Morton — addressing Louisa, more than the last speaker, however. "I am an old soldier, accustomed to knocks and bruises, and not made of very fragile materials originally. But if it must be so I submit; and if I find you up when I return, my dear Madam, I will tell you how all this unfortunate affair took place."

"Up!" cried Mrs. Charlton; "why, it is only a quarter to ten yet. The truth is those Markhams are such bores, and one hears so little of anything but dogs and horses, partridges, pheasants, and foxes, that I always order the carriage a quarter

before nine, and in such a night as this one could not keep the servants out."

While Morton and Mr. Nethersole were gone Mrs. Charlton questioned the butler as to what he knew of the accident, and obtained the general facts, as far as the man knew them. The chaise had been overturned into the gravel-pit, he said, both the horses killed, and the carriage broken all to pieces; but how the post-boy had escaped he could not tell—he supposed he must have jumped off. He added many expressions of wonder that both the gentlemen had not been killed, and added that the bank was full fifty feet high. This, indeed, was an exaggeration, but it served with the rest of the story to make poor Louisa's heart feel cold, and her cheek to turn deadly pale. Mrs. Charlton went on questioning him, however, for nearly a quarter of an hour, not at all minding, perhaps not comprehending, the mental torture which her step-daughter was enduring; and at the end of that time Morton returned with the blood washed from his face, his dress arranged with its usual neatness, and his fine hair waving over his forehead, brought a little more forward than ordinary, to hide a wound upon his temple, which Mr. Nethersole had just covered with black plaster.

That gentleman accompanied his new patient; but after a few words of assurance to Mrs. Charlton and Louisa that Mr. Morton was not severely hurt, and giving a warning to him that he had better keep himself as quiet as possible for the next two days, for fear of producing feverish symptoms, he retired to visit his own house for a few minutes, and then once more cross the common in the midst of the drenching rain, to sit up through the night with Alfred Latimer. Truly the life of a country apothecary is a hard one. Repose he can never count upon for a moment; fatigue he must endure every hour; all the vicissitudes of the seasons, all the inclemency of the storm he must bear, unmurmuring, for the reward of a few shillings, eked out by the administration of much physic. The scenes, too, he must go through — the pangs he must witness — the agony, the despair, the death, the grief that he must behold, if not share! — all these are without reward, and yet there is no one who is so much grudged by ungrateful

human nature the pitiful recompense of his mere toil. Verily, man, thou art a very unlovable sort of beast.

Leaving Mr. Nethersole, however, to pursue his way, we must sit down with Mrs. Charlton, Mr. Morton, and Louisa in the comfortable drawing-room at Mallington, not exactly to listen to all their conversation, for the reader can very well divine how Morton explained what had occurred without our entering into the details of what he said. He was not, indeed, one of those men who love to be the hero of their own story, and to excite interest for themselves, by dwelling upon each small particular of any event that has occurred to them. Nor, had he been one of those interesting gentlemen, would he on the present occasion have lingered with painful minuteness over every point of horror and dismay, for he well knew that poor Louisa had already suffered more on his account than he ever wished to inflict upon her; but he told the tale briefly, stated how the man had imprudently got down and left his horses — how they had run away; and how in a few seconds the chaise and all that it contained were dragged over into the pit.

Mrs. Charlton was greatly touched at his account of her son's condition, now that she found she should not have to go out over the common to nurse him; and she was in high good humour with Mr. Morton, expressing her gratitude again and again, for all he had done, though that gentleman, of course, did not touch upon the transactions in London till he could find opportunity of speaking with the lady alone.

But Mrs. Charlton gave proof of her gratitude in the way which Morton could have most desired, for, after talking with him for half an hour, she rose suddenly, as if recollecting that he had had no refreshment, and, blaming herself for her negligence, declared she would go and order some supper to be instantly prepared. Now, she could quite as well have ordered it where she sat; and, therefore, it is but fair to suppose that she considered the feelings of the two lovers, which she knew them right well to be; and, giving a hint that she had two or three little things to do, she retired, bidding Louisa let her know in her own room when supper was announced.

A faint smile came across Louisa's lip at conduct which she did not very well understand, yet which was certainly in no degree unpleasant to her, but she had soon to turn her thoughts to other and sweeter things, for Morton immediately came over, sat down on the sofa beside her, and taking her hand in his pressed his lips upon it.

"You have been grieved and agitated, dear Louisa," he said, "but I trust that good rather than evil may result to Latimer from this accident; and I, you see, am unhurt."

"I can scarcely think it possible, even yet, Edmond," she replied, leaving him the fair small hand in his. "When I think of that awful fall, it makes my heart still beat;" and she closed her eyes for a moment as if to shut out the image which fancy presented. Morton gazed at her as she sat with the long black lashes resting on the soft pale cheek; for she had not yet recovered her colour; but when she opened her eyes again, and they met that warm yet tender gaze, the rose came brightly back.

"Nay, nay, Morton," she said. "Do not look at me so — there, you are smiling at my fears; but you cannot tell what a woman's feelings are in such cases. I dare say if we were accustomed to go through dangers as you are, we should grow accustomed to them, and treat them lightly, too; but we are always left at home, with nothing to do but to ponder over the perils of those we love;" and she bent down her head for a moment, while a tear, the first she had shed, sparkled upon her eyelids. It did not roll far down her cheek, for her lover's lips brushed it away; and he soothed her tenderly with assurance that he never did, and never would expose himself to unnecessary danger.

"And yet," she answered, "I shall never see you leave me without, I dare say, conjuring up all sorts of perils; but, tell me, Edmond, what is the real state of poor Alfred; and have you contrived to disentangle him from those difficulties into which he had plunged himself."

"I have, my beloved," replied Morton, though, to say truth, he would have much preferred talking of love and all the feelings of Louisa's own dear heart. "He is now freed from all embarrassments, if he will keep himself so. I fear that will never be the

case, however; for he has not only been brought up in habits of extravagance in which he has no right to indulge, but he has got a taste for vice, which must keep him always poor; but I should propose to you one thing, dear girl, which I know will be agreeable to you. The income he has now left, according to the arrangement that has been made, is so much diminished that with his habits it will never be sufficient. I can supply him for the present as far as he needs it; but it is always a humiliating thing to be under obligations to one who is nearly a stranger; and, I think, when Louisa will consent to be my wife it may be as well for her as her own act, not only to make some addition to Mrs. Charlton's income, but also to settle such a sum upon him as will put him beyond all ordinary temptation to incur fresh debts. You may well do it in your quality of sister; and perhaps it might rouse any better feelings within him to merit your kindness."

"You are always generous and thoughtful, Edmond," replied Louisa Charlton; "and it shall be just as you please. I can only say that you go before my wishes, though, perhaps, I might not have ventured to ask you to make such a sacrifice."

"I wish to make none, dear girl," replied Morton; "this should be done before you are my wife, that it may be all your own act. Otherwise it will lose part of its effect upon him. It will be enough for me to cancel the bond he has given for the money I have furnished, and that shall be done, Louisa, on our wedding-day. I need not tell Louisa Charlton that whatever she may choose to do with any part of her fortune before our marriage, it will be well pleasing to the man she has chosen."

"I wish my poor father could have heard you, Edmond; it would have removed many of his anxieties on my account," was Louisa's reply, and she leaned her head upon her lover's shoulder, while the tears again filled her eyes.

"Perhaps he does hear even now, dear one," said Morton; "who can tell what may be the means which the spirits of the gone have of knowing what is passing round those they love? But—not to dwell upon so solemn a subject just now — of one thing I have always been satisfied: that wealth ought ever to be looked upon, not as a benefit conferred upon ourselves for our own gratification, but

a precious trust confided to us for its due administration to others. In whatever hands it accumulates, to whomsoever it descends, it is but as a stream collected into a great reservoir to fertilize and refresh all that is around it. If, by what I propose, you can reclaim this young man — if you can even prevent him from falling into further degradation, the employment of your fortune will be noble and good; and even should the experiment altogether fail, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your part. Then, as to Mrs. Charlton, the income she possesses is not sufficient, and of course will be less when you are no longer with her."

"It is very strange," said Louisa thoughtfully — "I mean my father's will. There are some parts of it I do not at all understand. He seemed to love her very much, and yet he leaves her with an insufficient income. I do not think he altogether relied upon her judgment, or her — her — her affection for me; and yet he" —

She paused, and Morton added, "He leaves you dependent in some degree upon her pleasure, or her caprice, you would say, my Louisa. We shall see how she attempts to exercise the authority she has received. Of one thing, however, I am sure, that the law would read that part of the will somewhat differently from what she supposes — perhaps, set it aside altogether. At all events, dear Louisa, I have your promise — rich or poor, you are mine. That is beyond the power of any one to change. Is it not so, my beloved?"

"Oh, Edmond!" said Louisa, "you know that I could only wish to possess wealth to place it in the hands of one who would use it as you would. But could you really — nay, I will not ask the question, Edmond — I know you would take her you love, rich or poor; but what ought she to do? ought she to consent to such a thing?"

"I will give her no choice," answered Morton, pressing her to his heart. "She has given her promise — she has made no condition; and under no circumstances would she seek to retract it, I am sure. Indeed," he added, smiling, "I would not consent, if she did. She is fast bound, and cannot escape."

"I do not wish it, Edmond, I do not wish it," repeated

Louisa, earnestly. "I should hardly have fortitude to cast away such happiness, even for your sake."

As she spoke the butler announced that supper was ready, and, though Morton felt the truth of the old French proverb "*qui fait l'amour soupe*," he was forced to sit down to the less pleasant meal, and make the best of a dull hour.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

After Morton and Mr. Nethersole had left Mother Brown's cottage Alfred Latimer lay for several minutes gazing up towards the ceiling of the back room in which he had been placed — if ceiling, indeed, it could be called, where a good deal more lath was apparent than plaster, and that portion of the latter which remained was principally supported by long filaments of horse-hair, which not unfrequently suffered a large mass of mortar to hang waving about in the wind over the heads of those who went to and fro beneath. A small deal table, notched at the edges like a school-boy's desk, and with "Tom Brown" cut in large capitals in two or three places, stood in the middle of the chamber, at no great distance from the bed; and on it, in a battered tin candle-stick, was a solitary tallow candle, with the top of the wick spreading out into sooty fungi, and the grease weltering down the sides. A tattered old chintz curtain half concealed the window; but where the sash appeared it showed many a piece of glass wanting, in one spot pasted up with brown paper, while in others the gaping aperture was stuffed up with dirty rags. To these interesting objects the young gentleman turned his eyes, after he had studied the canopy over his head for a considerable time, and then he exclaimed "D—n it! This is very strange. Why, I feel all knocked about; and where the devil I am, I can't tell. Surely that is Wilkinson. Why, what is all this? Where am I? How came I here?"

It was very evident that, as not uncommonly happens in such cases, the blow he had received on the head had obliterated all memory of the events immediately preceding. It is generally judged expedient to touch upon the subject of his state, as little as

possible with a patient so circumstanced; but Wilkinson, though a shrewd sensible man, had not studied the matter very deeply, and he consequently set to work, and, with a view of amusing his young master, told him all that had happened. The tale seemed to awaken Alfred Latimer's remembrance; and when he heard that he was in Mother Brown's cottage he instantly showed that his recollection was quite unimpaired, by saying in a low voice "Where are my clothes, Wilkinson? Put them here on the bed, and do not let the people get at them, for there is a good sum of money in one of the pockets. Don't lose sight of them for a minute, Wilkinson; for it would be a devil of an affair if they were to take that."

"Don't you think it would be better to send it to mistress to keep for you, Sir?" asked the servant; "you see I might be called away for a minute or two."

"No, curse it! she would keep it with a vengeance," answered her dutiful and respectful son. "I should get it back as soon from them as I should from her."

"Then, why not give it to Mr. Nethersole, to take care of for you till you are well," replied the man; "it would be quite safe with him."

"Well, perhaps I may," rejoined Latimer; "that 's no bad thought — but the doctor is gone, isn't he?"

Wilkinson made him understand that Mr. Nethersole would soon be back; and then remembering the caution which had been given, he warned Mr. Latimer that he ought not to speak, but to remain quiet. Alfred Latimer, however, was not a man to restrain himself in anything; and therefore he continued to ask questions and to swear at his companion if he answered briefly, or remonstrated, till the servant's patience becoming near its end, he replied "Indeed, Mr. Latimer, I must obey the doctor's orders, and as you will not be quiet and keep silent, I will go into the other room, but I will take care no one comes in without me."

"Go to the devil, if you like," replied Alfred Latimer; "I don't want you; but snuff the candle first."

The man did as he was directed, and then left the room. The young gentleman then attempted to sit up, and drew his clothes

from the foot of the bed, that he might see if his money were all safe; but the effort was too painful to be persisted in, and he lay down again with a moan. About half an hour after this Mr. Nethersole returned, and having heard from the servant in the outer room that Mr. Latimer was very unmanageable, he replied "Oh! I will keep him quiet. I shall stay here till morning; so you can either remain or go home for an hour or two, as you like; only be back by five o'clock; for I have a case I must see."

"Well, then, Sir, I would rather go home for a bit," answered Wilkinson, "I was up early this morning, and I should like a few hours' sleep."

"I wonder where my lad 's to sleep," said Widow Brown, in a sullen tone. "That 's his bed, in where the younker is lying; and half the things spoiled with blood."

"Oh, never you mind, Mother Brown," answered Mr. Nethersole, who knew his party well, "you 'll be paid more than you spend; and as to Tom's sleeping, it is not the first time he has sat up o'nights, I fancy, and won't be the last. You 've slept in worse places than this chair, Tom, havn't you? and the shooting season being begun, you must be in practice, or I mistake. You forget who you 're talking to, Goody."

"Well, doctor," said Mother Brown, with a grin, "if he have got a partridge or pheasant now and then, you 've had your share on 'em; and better stuff nor ever come out o' your shop, too."

"I know I have had a little present now and then, Mother Brown," replied Mr. Nethersole; "and I never ask where anything comes from but humbug, and that I always send back again. So don't whine to me about where Tom is to sleep. He 'll do well enough, and you 'll be paid. That 's all you want. It 's raining too hard for guns to go off, or he wouldn't be here. I understand it all; but it 's no business of mine; and I always mind my own business, as you well know. That 's the way to be friends with every one; and you can't say I ever refused to see you when you were sick, or give you medicine either. Pay when you can, when you can't let it alone; but never attempt to palaver me, for that is what I cannot bear."

"Well, you are a good cretur," answered the beldame; "only you see that we are paid, for that Mrs. Charlton, rich as she is, is a bit of a screw, and does not pay every one as she ought."

"Oh, you 'll be paid, you 'll be paid!" replied the surgeon, walking into the other room; and then shutting the door, he held up his finger again to Mr. Latimer not to speak, sat down by his bed-side, and felt his pulse. "A little fever," he said, as if speaking to himself. "I am afraid there has been some excitement here. In your case, Mr. Latimer, Harpocrates is as good as Hippocrates, and better; but we must make them go hand in hand — Silence, my dear, Sir! silence! Not a single word, if you please. I am going to sit by your bed-side all night; and if you want anything, just hold up your finger. I shall divine what you want, and give it you."

"You 'll be devilish clever, then," said Alfred Latimer aloud, "for I want something now" —

"Not a word! not a word!" said Mr. Nethersole, stopping both his ears; "I will not listen to a word," and approaching the table, he pulled a phial out of his pocket, poured about a third of it out into a little cup which he had brought with him, and presented it to the patient, saying, "drink that. Then turn round on your right side and try to get to sleep; that will compose you wonderfully."

"Why, I 'm quite composed already," answered the other.

"You won't be soon, if you go on so," answered Mr. Nethersole, drily, "for, in two hours you 'll be in a burning fever if you talk at all; in two days you will be lying composed enough; and in less than two weeks you will go out of that door with your feet foremost."

This speech had the desired effect, though, undoubtedly, it was rather strong in language. Alfred Latimer did not at all like the prospect so unceremoniously presented to him, and drinking off the draught, he lay down as he was bid and kept silence, while Mr. Nethersole seated himself in the chair by his side, and taking a medical book out of his pocket began to read. Nine times did Mr. Nethersole snuff the candle; and then, as there was no use

of snuffing it any longer, he went into the next room and got another. Mother Brown had gone to bed; her son was snoring in a chair; and when he returned the worthy surgeon found that Alfred Latimer was breathing hard too. The example he judged a good one, and as he could find nothing on which to prop his head softer than his own arms, he folded them on the table, bent down his forehead upon them, and was soon in that strange mysterious state, wherein the distinction between the life of the body and the life of the soul, is more plain than in any of the other phenomena of our marvellous existence.

He had gone on for some hours, and Alfred Latimer was still in a sound and comfortable sleep when the worthy surgeon was suddenly awakened by the opening of the door. He looked up, and saw the widow's son beckoning to him.

"Here 's your boy, doctor, wants you quick," said the man, in a low tone.

"The deuce he does," murmured the surgeon; "that Mrs. Tilson come before her time — she always does — I never saw anything like it."

It was, indeed, as he supposed; and after a brief conference with the boy at the door, he returned and looked at his patient, and then at his watch. The former was still enjoying as tranquil repose as if he had never been bruised almost to a mummy, and the latter pointed to a quarter past four.

"Wilkinson must be back in three-quarters of an hour at the farthest," said Mr. Nethersole, "and Mrs. Tilson can't wait, that 's certain. No great harm can happen; for he 's doing quite well, and for that matter I might just as well have been at home, and in my bed, if he had not been Mrs. Charlton's son. Here, Tom," he continued, putting his head into the next room, and speaking in a low voice to Mother Brown's son, who seemed settling himself to sleep again; "When Wilkinson returns tell him to give his young master one half of that draught; and to send to me, at Mrs. Tilson's, at Shedbury, if anything goes wrong," and going out he mounted the horse the boy had brought, looked up to the sky, which now suffered the stars to peep out from time to time through the clouds, and rode away.

The moment he had gone Tom Brown set the bottle down upon the table, and put his forefinger to his forehead. He was a dull-looking man, with short cut black hair, like the *chevelure* of a shoe-brush; but yet there was a keen cunning light stole out of his somewhat oblique eyes when he thus set himself to consider, which had something dangerous and sinister in it.

"Three-quarters of an hour," he said, meditating, "that 's well nigh an hour, may like. Howsomdever, I won't do nothing alone. I 'll take advice and have help; for he might get up right, by chance, and then one would have to put him out o' pain. Nobody would know it — One knock 's as good as another, and he 's in such a smash 't wouldn't be seen. He said he 'd a lot o' money — I heard un, and mother, too; but he didn't say how much, so who can tell. We might take a bit, and leave some upon account. Mother could hold the candle while I took the money, and Jack stood by wi' the poker, ready to stop noise."

It was a perilous moment for Alfred Latimer, who continued to sleep soundly; and the man walking to the foot of the stairs called his mother; but in so low a voice that she did not hear.

"What 's the matter?" said some one in deep masculine tones. "He 's not dying, is he?"

"Poo, no!" cried Tom Brown. "Nothing like it at present; but we shall see soon. I want you, Jack Williams, and mother, too. Go and give her a shake in t' other room, and bid her come down a-tiptoe."

Jack Williams, without reply, went and woke Mother Brown, who hurried on some rags of clothes, and descended to the room where Williams and her son were already in conference. As she went down she stumbled over an iron pot which had been carelessly put at the foot of the stairs; and the pot, on being disturbed at that hour of the night, uttered a loud complaint. Alfred Latimer started, turned round, and gazed about him. The door between his room and the next had been left partly ajar, and he heard the sound of voices speaking. They were subdued; but yet many — nay, most of the words were distinct to an ear quickened by a slight degree of feverish excitement. At first, indeed, suddenly roused from sleep, he had forgotten where he was, and

his whole thoughts were confused; but his mind soon cleared itself, and he heard the tongue of Mother Brown, as she was called, going pretty sharply.

"It 's no use taking the flimsies," she said; "they 'd be knowed and traced directly, and we should all get nabbed. But I don't see there can be any harm in seeing what yellow boys may be in his pockets. It would be spoony enough to let them go, when he 'd know nothing about it. He was always a careless hand, I 've heard; and he might ha' dropped 'em while they were lugging him out of the chay, or arterwards, or any how, for what he 'd know."

"I 'd take the flimsies, too," said her well-educated son. "If we couldn't flash them ourselves, we could get some one to do it; and if that didn't do they would be sure to be advertised and a reward offered, which we could send some fence to receive for us. So I 'd take all — make a sweep out; and I know what" —

"Well, what do you know?" said a deep stern voice that Alfred Latimer instantly recognised as that of Jack Williams; "Let's hear what you know, Master Tom."

"Why I should not like to do anything to him sleeping," answered Tom Brown; "but it would not be a bad job if he woke just as we were about it, and got a quiet knock o' the head — a little would do it now, and no one the wiser."

"And I know what, too," answered Jack Williams aloud — "that none of you shall take a penny of his, or lay a finger on him. Why, confound you all, he 's one of our own friends, and we should act like gentlemen to one another. He 'll make as fine a fellow as ever lived one of these days, if a set of puling fools do not get hold of him, and preach the spirit out of him, making him as canting a hypocrite as any of themselves. But I don't think there 's much chance of that. The lad 's young, and has not had much experience; yet he is sharp enough, and I have seen signs of a bold strong heart in him and a determined spirit, fit to command. I 'll have no pitiful tricks, Tom Brown; so, look you, Mr. Latimer is under my protection, and let any one take a penny from him if they dare."

The conversation did not only fall upon Alfred Latimer's ear,

but sunk into his heart. The boldness with which Williams stood forward in his defence touched one of the few better points about him; and the language that he used was immediately put in strong opposition to that which Mr. Quatterly had employed. The latter had shown that, in the higher ranks of life, a reputation once even stained could never be rendered wholly pure; the latter proved that good feeling of a particular kind can be mingled with crimes and faults of a very deep die. He fancied that the door was closed upon him in one course, and that it was open in another; and that low-toned conversation which he then overheard was more injurious to every good principle than the most potent arguments could have proved, if addressed to himself directly. While he was still listening the outer door of the cottage was heard to open, and he distinguished the voice of his mother's servant Wilkinson. Alfred Latimer turned round, and affected to be asleep, but, in reality, he wished to meditate undisturbed over what he had just heard; a meditation more destructive to him than if the basest of the two villains had carried his worst plans into execution.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THERE was spot in Mallington Park where the ground, approaching the river at a point where the banks were low and the stream broad and shallow, was inundated during a great part of the spring and autumn. A number of stunted willows, growing out of long sedge and rushes, covered about four acres of land, diversified here and there by tall poplars gathered into groups of five or six planted close together. This swamp might easily have been drained; but Edmonds, the park-keeper, who loved to see every variety in the domain entrusted to his charge, had refrained from doing so; and he had also another object, for as all the gamekeepers were under his orders, he took care that his lord's table should never want any species of wild fowl that the season and country afforded, and felt a pride in being able to send up to London anything that might be required. This watery piece of ground, then, was a sort of preserve during the winter months for

a great number of the duck tribe; the snipe, too, was always to be found there, and not unfrequently the bittern; for the part of the park where it was situated was one very little frequented, being beyond the spot where the road we have so often mentioned turned over the bridge. A sandy path, however, neatly kept and raised a little above the neighbouring ground, wound round the marsh, taking a thousand turns and bends among the trees; and then passing through a thick copse, and over two small bridges and a ferny deer pasture, it joined the broad road that led direct from the house to the great gates.

On the evening after the accident which, with its consequences, has occupied so much of our attention, about half an hour before nightfall, the graceful and delicate figure of Lucy Edmonds was observed walking along the sandy path by the side of the swamp, which at that shady hour, with the willows, the poplars, and the long flags and rushes, catching but in few places a glimpse of the departing day, offered a dreary and melancholy scene enough. She had a basket on her arm, as if she were carrying something home from one of the cottages, of which there were two or three within the walls; and her fair face was sad, with her eyes bent down upon the ground.

I have said that she was observed; for there was one watching her; and when she came into the part of the wood where the trees closed thickest on all sides, Jack Williams walked slowly out from amongst the nearest group of poplars, and walked quietly on to meet her. Lucy started on seeing him; but it was the suddeness of his appearance that alone surprised her; and her manner clearly showed that she had seen and held communication of some kind with him before.

"Ah! Mr. Williams," she said, with a faint smile crossing her lip, and flitting away again in an instant, "I did not expect to see you here."

"No, Miss Lucy," replied the man; "but I came to meet you, for I watched you out an hour ago; and I thought you would like to hear the truth of how he is going on, poor fellow."

Lucy turned towards him with a look of apprehension. "Going

on!" she cried — "Poor fellow! What do you mean, Mr. Williams? Oh! tell me, what is the matter now?"

"What, have you not heard?" asked Williams; "why, it is all over Mallington. He has met with a bad accident; but don't frighten yourself; he is better, and will do well — that is if his spirits are kept up."

"Oh, Heaven!" cried Lucy Edmonds, with the tears in her eyes. "I wish I were dead. — What accident, Mr. Williams — tell me, tell me; for though I can do no good, yet I must hear."

"Why, the matter is this, Miss Lucy," replied the man, in a kindly tone — "but don't frighten yourself — he will do very well, I tell you. But the matter is this, as I was saying — I wrote him a note, you know, telling him that your father wished you to marry young Garland; and off he set from London directly. Mr. Morton, as they call him, a gentleman who has been staying down here" —

"Oh! I know him, I know him very well," replied Lucy Edmonds; "he has been several times to see my father."

"Well, he was in the chaise with Mr. Latimer," continued Williams; "and they came on at a great rate till they reached Mallington Common, about eight o'clock last night. There the horses ran away with them, and went over the bank into Mother Brown's Pit. Mr. Morton was very little hurt, but poor Alfred was taken out speechless."

The man paused, and Lucy wrung her hands in bitter grief. "But you say he is better," she cried, after a moment's silence, "you say he is better. Oh! tell me true, Mr. Williams."

"Yes, he is better," answered her companion — "a good deal better; but I know what would make him quite well."

"And what is that?" demanded Lucy Edmonds, partly divining what his answer would be.

"If you would come and see him, Miss Lucy," said Williams, "or promise to do so to-morrow; it would do him more good than all the stuff out of Dr. Nethersole's shop."

"That is impossible," answered Lucy Edmonds, firmly; "how could I go up to Mallington House? — and besides" —

"He is not at Mallington House," replied Williams, inter-

rupting her; "he is at Mother Brown's cottage, on the common, where he was first taken. You could come quite well, and nobody know anything of it."

"No," answered Lucy, "I promised my father that I would not see him, and I cannot — do not say a word, Mr. Williams, for nothing shall make me break my promise."

"Then you are a very silly girl," answered Williams sternly; "or else you are going to do what your father wishes, and marry young Garland. Ay, ay! Count upon a woman's love! It is no more to be leaned upon than one of those sedges. But I 'll go away, and tell him to think of you, and break his heart for you, no more; for that you have got a new lover, and care no more for him."

"Oh, do not, do not be so cruel," said Lucy, weeping bitterly; "you know that what you say is not true. Tell him, if you will, not to think of me any more; for my father says he will never let him have me; so it is better that he should forget me. But do not tell him I have or can forget him, for that is false."

"Well, I will tell him what you say," replied Williams, "but he won't easily believe you love him much, if you will not come to see him even when he is lying sick. He will think that you do not wish to know how he is."

"Oh, he knows better," replied Lucy; "ke knows I would give anything in the world to hear every day how he is."

"Well, I can let you know that," said Williams. "I 'm sure I 'd do a good deal to make you happy, Miss Lucy; and if you can come out about this place of an evening — say at this time — I will be down and tell you how he is going on as long as there is any danger, for I am lodging at Widow Brown's, and I see him very often."

"Oh, do, do," cried Lucy, eagerly, "I will come whenever I can; but do not wait long for me; for my father might prevent me, or send me somewhere else, you know. But I will come whenever I can, indeed I will."

"Well, you are a good girl after all, and do love him, I believe," replied Williams.

"Oh, you know I do, too well!" answered Lucy Edmonds.

"Then you are very silly for not following your love," answered the man; "fathers have always such crotchets; and if a girl did not take her own way, no girl would ever marry the man she loves. What the devil right has your father to stop you? He 's not going to marry the man. If Mr. Latimer did not mean fair by you, it would be another thing; but he has offered to marry you at once — ay, and he will marry you too, whatever your father may say, for love will have its way."

"But my promise, my promise," said Lucy, with a deep sigh.

"Nonsense about promises," answered Williams, "they never hold good long against love, Lucy Edmonds. However, I will bring you word how Alfred is going on every evening about this time; and you can come and hear it if you like; so now good night, for you must not make the old folks suspicious."

Lucy bade him adieu, and, wiping the traces of tears from her eyes, walked on towards her home, little dreaming to what her promise to meet that man there, might ultimately lead. Williams remained gazing after her; and his feelings were of so stange and mixed a nature that we may well pause to look into them more closely. He gazed after Lucy Edmonds, I have said, and certainly with some admiration of her beauty; but it was with no thought of robbing Alfred Latimer of the heart he had won, even if it had been possible; and the only observation he made to himself was — "She 's very pretty: it is a pity he should not have her." But it was not that he was without those passions which might have led him to seek to possess the fair being he thus admired; or merely that he felt towards another in a distant land — though such was the case — that fierce eager love which often, in the most unprincipled, seems to absorb all those feelings that in less intense characters are roused by and divided amongst many; but every one has a peculiar morality of his own; and very often, where it is extended to the fewest possible points, it is the sternest and most inflexible upon them; and thus the man who would not hesitate one moment to rob another of his purse, or, in case of strife, to take the life of a fellow creature like that of a dog, would have shrunk with a sense of shame from acts that thousands of well-dressed gentlemanly men look upon as the amusement of a

morning. He would not have wronged one whom he regarded as a friend, nor have seduced his wife, nor taken his mistress, nor traduced his character, or betrayed his confidence. These are gentlemanly crimes, which were quite out of his station and out of his character. He had his own, indeed, black and terrible; but these he was without.

After Lucy was gone, he sat down upon the stump of a willow, and began to ponder on the future and the present. "She will make him a sweet wife," he thought; "and, though she 's very different from Margeritta, yet she will suit him. If we can get together money enough to buy a schooner out there, and set ourselves up in one of those beautiful little islands, we may carry on gloriously. I can sail the ship, and he can do many things that I can't. It 's just the life to suit him. I wonder if he 'll consent. If we carry off pretty Lucy by force he 'll be obliged; for he must be off as fast as possible. I have him there; and then it will be the best thing he can do. I long to see Black Jack flying over us; but I must not let him squander away his money with Bill Maltby and such fellows. We 'll have no Bill Maltby amongst us either. He 's a pitiful knave — cheats at cards and dice. We 'll have bold fellows, that can fight only; and then we 'll make fine work with the turbans. But he has no notion of my plan yet; and I had better sound him. I 'll tell him some stories of what happened last year at Zante, and see how he likes it. But once we 've carried her off, he must go; and then what better could he do?"

Such were some of the thoughts of him who deserved the name of ruffian more than villain; but there were many other ideas crossed his mind — fleeting, transitory, and strange — sensations, rather than thoughts, making a strange mixed mass of good and of evil, of coarse fierceness and many softer emotions. The bad undoubtedly greatly predominated over the good; but still, when he thought of the bright islands of the blue Ægean Sea, a feeling for natural beauty, which often acts as one of the best purifiers of the heart, but which is often present even in the most stern and savage characters, gave him a thirsty longing to revisit those scenes again, even more powerful than the eager desire for active and energetic enterprise; and without more ado he rose, made his

way to the parkwall, and, leaping over it, descended the road, crossed the river, and walked on with a rapid step to the common above Mallington. A carriage was standing at the nearest point of the road to the cottage of Widow Brown, and Williams at once recognised the liveries of Mrs. Charlton. He saw, likewise, the horse of Mr. Nethersole, fat and pursy as usual, notwithstanding some severe work during the preceding night and that day; and, judging that his presence at the moment would not be very acceptable, he walked on over the common with a leisurely sauntering pace, still keeping within sight, but affecting to amuse himself with looking at the shrubs and bushes. He then descended into the pit, where he saw some people gathered about the spot where the chaise had fallen; and he found that the little crowd which he had observed was occupied with the removal of the two dead horses in a cart from Mr. Markham's kennel. In one of the persons there assembled, however, he instantly recognised a gentleman whom he had no great inclination to meet — namely, Mr. Gibbs, the traveller, with whom he had made a somewhat unpleasant acquaintance in Wenlock Wood; but Williams was not one to suffer even conscience to cow him, and he gazed upon the other's face with a stern and stedfast look, more like that of an injured person than of one who had committed an injury. He was very much surprised, however, when Gibbs, who when he had last met him before Dr. Western wore anything but a well-satisfied aspect, now advanced to meet him with a pleasant smirk upon his face, saying, "Ah, Mr. Williams, I am very glad to see you."

"Indeed!" said Williams, without relaxing a feature of his face; "that is more than I can say to you. What makes you glad to see me, pray?"

"Because, Mr. Williams," replied the traveller, "I always like to do justice; and though, when I last beheld you, I thought you were very like the man who knocked me down and robbed me on the other side of the water, I am now convinced that I was quite mistaken, and that you had nothing to do with it."

There were plenty of persons present to overhear this speech; and Williams replied, drily, "Oh, you are, are you? Well, better late than never; but let it teach you not to suspect innocent

people again. I should like to hear, however, what it is has convinced you at last. I 've neither grown taller nor shorter, have not shaved off my whiskers, nor cut off my hair."

"Ah, Sir, if you would but use a little of the fine Exotic Balm of Trinidad," cried Mr. Gibbs, "it would so improve the curl and the gloss both of your hair and your whiskers you would scarcely know yourself. I have supplied three shops in this town, and you can get it either at Mr. Shanklin's, or the Miss Martins', or Mr. Warren's — but you were asking what had convinced me? I will tell you in a moment. In the first place, the man must have been a good deal taller than you; in the next place, he wore different shoes; and, in the third place, I find you changed a five pound note that very day at the inn, and another yesterday at the linendraper's. Now, no notes were taken from me; and a man is not likely to take another man's money when his own pockets are full."

"He may want to fill them fuller," anwered Williams, in an indifferent tone, "so that 's no reason, Mr. What 's-your-name; but as for me, I got my pay and prize money when my ship was paid off; so I had enough of my own for the time being; but when it is all spent, if you will tell me which way you are going with a good lot of gold about you, I 'll see what I can do with yours."

He spoke laughing, and Mr. Gibbs laughed, too — quite heartily. Nay, he even added, "Well, I did you injustice, Mr. Williams; I beg your pardon for it frankly, and as its growing dark, if you will come down to the Bagpipes we will have a bowl of punch together, and forget all grievances."

"I can't just now," answered Williams; "but I will to-morrow night if you like."

Mr. Gibbs agreed to this change of his proposed plan, and Williams, seeing the top of Mrs. Charlton's carriage the sight of which he just caught over the bank moving rapidly away, turned upon his heel and entered the cottage.

Several of the persons who had overheard this conversation stared at Mr. Gibbs; and one of them, a surly carter, who knew Jack Williams well, uttered in a murmur between his teeth — what was probably the internal opinion of all — "Well, you 're a

fool, if ever there was one;" but in this instance, at least, Mr. Gibbs was not such a fool as people thought. The cart moved off with the two dead horses; and the people, who had been gathered round, followed it. Mr. Gibbs remained for a moment or two behind, then stooping down, as if to tie his shoe, he pulled something out from beneath a bramble bush, scratching himself a good deal as he did so; and then climbing the bank, he paused as soon as he got into the clearer light which the higher ground afforded, examined something which he held in his hand attentively, and walked straight away to Mallington House.

CHAPTER XXX.

Mr. Morton was dressing for dinner, when a servant entered his room, saying, "There is a person below, Sir, who wishes to speak with you directly upon business of importance."

"Indeed!" said Morton calmly, "did he give his name?"

"He said his name is Gibbs, Sir," answered the footman, "and that he would not detain you a minute."

"I know no such person," replied the young gentleman, looking at his watch; "however, as there is time, tell him that I am dressing; but if his business be of real importance, he can see me here. If not, let him call to-morrow."

The man retired, and in two or three minutes returned, ushering in Mr. Gibbs. As soon as Morton beheld the face of his visitor, he recollected the intrusive personage whom he had seen on the bank of the river; and he regretted having given him admission at that moment, when there was a chance of conversing with Louisa alone for a short time before Mrs. Charlton came down. He resolved to cut the interview short, however; and merely bending his head, he inquired what was Mr. Gibbs business with him.

Mr. Gibbs in return bowed low, very low, indeed; and then hemmed and bowed again, while the servant shut the door and retired.

"Well, Sir," said Morton, waxing somewhat impatient.

"My name is Gibbs, Sir," rejoined the other with a most agreeable smile, "and yours is Morton."

The young gentleman bowed his head.

"This pocket-book, then, I suppose belongs to you," said Mr. Gibbs, in reply to this mute assent.

Morton started and turned round, "Yes, Sir, it does," he said, "I must have dropped it in getting out of the chaise last night — it is very strange I did not miss it."

It would, indeed, have been strange, if he had not been so near Louisa Charlton; but that altered the whole case, and Morton might have dropped many a more valuable thing without missing it during the whole of that day. Mr. Gibbs placed the wetted and soiled book in its owner's hands, with another low bow, adding, in a marked and peculiar tone, "I was obliged, Sir, to open it and examine the contents, to ascertain to whom it belonged."

This intimation, from some cause or other, seemed to give Morton cause for thought; but a length looking up with a light and half laughing look, he replied, "I understand what you mean, Mr. Gibbs; and all I can say is, that I must trust to your discretion, which, if it prove stable, shall not go unrewarded."

"Pray, do not mention such a thing, Sir," replied Mr. Gibbs, "my discretion you may fully trust to without any reward; and, indeed, there is a subject on which I have wished to speak to you for two or three days, which will show you how discreet I can be."

"I think I must ask you to choose another time, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton, looking again at his watch. "I must go down as soon as I am dressed."

"When you please, Sir," answered the traveller, "but, before you are dressed I can give you an inkling of the matter. I think you take a good deal of interest in the family of a park-keeper over the river, named Edmonds."

"I do, certainly;" said Morton, "he is a very good, respectable man."

"And in his daughter, I believe, Sir," rejoined Mr. Gibbs.

Morton drew up his head, and looked at his companion in

some surprise. "I do not understand your meaning, Sir," he answered. "I have once, or perhaps twice, seen his daughter, but I take no other interest in her than in the rest of his family. Pray explain yourself."

"Why, I thought, Sir — I thought," replied Mr. Gibbs, hesitating, "I thought I saw you — I am sure it was a gentleman — speaking with her for nearly an hour about a fortnight ago — it might be a few days more or less — in the park; and he came from this house, and went back to this house; and now I thought — that is to say I suspected — I mean I imagined, that it might be interesting to him to know that she is in the custom of meeting — that is to say I am sure she has met four days ago, and to-night, too, a man named Williams, who was supposed — that is to say accused, or suspected of knocking me down and robbing me in Wenlock Wood, when I was here last."

Now, all this information was interesting to Mr. Morton; for it gave him a clue to part of Alfred Latimer's conduct — at least he thought so; and before answering, he pondered for a moment or two, uncertain how to act. He wished much to know what was the exact degree of intimacy between Alfred Latimer and Lucy Edmonds; and he doubted not in the least it was Mrs. Charlton's son who had been mistaken for himself. The facts of having seen Williams, whose name had been mentioned in his hearing, at the cottage of Widow Brown — of the man's meeting that night with Lucy — and of their preceding interview four days before, connected themselves with the letter Alfred Latimer had received, and with his eagerness to return to Mallington immediately after its delivery. In the ordinary affairs of life, as in the deep secrets of science, we often, by the leaping pole of imagination, jump at just conclusions before we can be said to have discovered them; and I believe no man ever proved a great fact which he had not first surmised. With Morton all was at present fancy — it was a conjectural collocation of circumstances; and the proof was yet to be obtained. But how? was the difficult question. To act as a spy, or to employ a spy upon any other man's actions, was not to be thought of, however great and beneficent might be the end in view. He was one of those men

who think that no end justifies base means: and he resolved to inquire no further — to let matters take their course, evolve themselves as they would; and at the same time to employ the information he had received as occasion might require.

"In the first place, Mr. Gibbs," replied, when his cogitations came to an end, "let me inform you that you are mistaken in supposing that I am the person whom you saw talking with Lucy Edmonds. I never spoke to her out of her father's house in my life, and at the time you mention was not a visitor here. May I ask how near you were to the person you supposed to be me, for you have certainly made a great mistake?"

"Oh dear, Sir, I was a long way off," replied Mr. Gibbs. "I was at the top of the house, amusing myself, as I usually do, with this little instrument," and he pulled out a small telescope from his pocket. "From the window of my room," he continued, "I command the park on one side, and the hill up to the common on the other, and I see all that goes on in the place."

"I should not think it a very profitable, or very worthy inquiry, Sir," replied Morton; "but every man has his tastes, and, as meddling with other people's business is not one of mine, I can have nothing further to do with the matter you have mentioned — except, indeed, to say that it would be, I think, but an act of Christian charity to warn poor Edmonds that his daughter is placing herself in dangerous circumstances. That would be drawing some good from perquisitions which I cannot advise you to pursue further."

"You mistake, Sir — you mistake — allow me very respectfully to say you mistake," said Mr. Gibbs, with some warmth; "you must allow me, Sir, to clear myself, although you are dressed, I see. I do not use my telescope for the purpose of prying into other people's affairs, though I can't help seeing them if they come in my way. But, Sir, the truth is this: I have been knocked down, and robbed near here. We could not identify the man; but I am not only quite sure of who he is, but also that there is a gang of very bad characters here, who will some day or another do great mischief, and I am resolved to bring them to justice. I have fixed my eye upon a particular man, Sir; and he

shall find that he can't escape that eye. I watch him and his doings every moment I have to spare, and ere long I shall get hold of the end of the clue, though he may hide it ever so cunningly."

"That alters the case very materially, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton; "and I trust that you will succeed in your endeavours; but in regard to this poor girl it would, I think, be an act of kindness on your part to speak with her father upon the subject, and leave it to him to take such steps as he may think fit. He is, as far I can learn, a very high-principled right-minded man, and I do not think would act harshly towards his child."

"May I ask, Sir," said Mr. Gibbs, in a low tone, "whether he is acquainted or not with certain circumstances — I wish to act discreetly, Sir — quite discreetly, and would not for the world betray a secret which had accidentally fallen into my possession."

"You are quite right, Mr. Gibbs," said Morton; "but to answer your question: he is not aware of anything — no one, indeed, is. The matter is of no great consequence, indeed; but every man has his whim."

"Oh, certainly, Sir — certainly," said Mr. Gibbs; "but I won't detain you longer, Sir; and if you have any further commands for me you will find me at the inn, Sir; for I have determined not to quit this place till I have got the right sow by the ear. But you cannot think, Sir, what an advantage it would be to your hair if you would use Grimsditch's incomparable Balm of Trinidad. It preserves and increases the natural curl — prevents it from falling off, or turning grey — communicates to it an admirable gloss — keeps it always, whether in rain or heat, in perfect order — and whether applied to the clustering ringlets of female loveliness, or to the bolder waves that float round the forehead of masculine beauty, it is admitted on all hands to be the only thing yet discovered which can be said to gild refined gold, and render perfection still more perfect."

"Well, send me some, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton, smiling; "and now indeed I must go, for I fear I am already late."

Mr. Gibbs made his bow, and retired, and Morton hastened down to the drawing-room, but was disappointed in his hope of finding Louisa alone. Mrs. Charlton was, indeed, not yet down;

but Dr. Western was seated on the sofa by the side of his fair ward. Morton would willingly have seen him ten minutes later, and though he shook the good clergyman's hand warmly, yet the rector very well understood his sensations.

"Ay, my young friend," he said, with a laughing look towards Louisa, which made the colour come up into her cheek. "I am very much in the way here, but I wanted to speak to you, so I came early, even at the risk of being the unfortunate third. Nay, Louisa, do not be angry with me, my dear child," he continued, seeing her rising as if she received what he had said as a hint to leave them. "You know I am the friend of both, and give my hearty consent and approval; so, if you run away, I shall think that you wish to hide your arrangements from me. I have nothing to say to him that you may not hear, though, perhaps, the confidence is not quite reciprocal. Morton, have you done what you said you would?"

"No, my dear Sir," replied Morton, "I have had no time. All to-day we have been in the strait waistcoat of society, and yesterday, while we were five minutes alone together we somehow talked of other things."

"Oh! I know how quite well," answered Dr. Western; "but time! — what need of time? — one minute will do it. My dear Louisa, let me introduce a friend of mine to you;" and leading Morton up to her, with a gay look he whispered a word in her ear.

Louisa Charlton drew back, and gazed in Morton's face with an expression of surprise almost amounting to alarm. But Morton, notwithstanding the good doctor's presence, threw his arms round her, saying, "Nay, my beloved, can a name make any difference to you?"

"No," murmured Louisa, "oh, no; but this takes me very much by surprise."

"Our good friend here is wrong," said Morton, "in telling you thus, dear Louisa. Nay, he is wrong in telling you at all as yet; for all is not settled, and I wished it to be so fully before I spoke."

"It is you who are wrong, Morton," replied Dr. Western, "the parson of the parish is always right. There should be no

secrets between two people circumstanced as you are. Nay, more, I have to tell you, Sir, that all is settled, as I will prove to you if you will come and partake of a plain dinner with me to-morrow, at five, and then take a long walk. Louisa shall share the dinner, if she will, but not the ramble; and in the meantime, Ma'am, remember that though I have taken the liberty of telling you other people's secrets, you are not to follow my bad example."

As he spoke, Mrs. Charlton entered the room, and found Morton, Louisa, and Dr. Western standing close together, with somewhat too evident symptoms of having been engaged in secret conclave. She made no observation, indeed; but a slight smile, somewhat sarcastic and triumphant, crossed her lip, as if she would have said, had she thought fit to speak what was passing within, "Ah, you think that I am blind; but you are playing my game, while you imagine you are playing your own." Morton marked it ere it fled; but, confident in his own rectitude, both in motive and act, he felt no embarrassment or confusion, and only asked himself, in consequence of what he saw, "When will this worthy lady suffer her object to appear. She shall take her own course," he added, in his own mind, "for it is well to know thoroughly a person with whom one is to be so closely connected."

Dr. Western, on his part, met the lady with a good-humoured and easy smile, telling her that "he had asked Miss Charlton and Mr. Morton to dine with him on the following day, and trusted she would be of the party."

"I suppose, in propriety, I ought to be," replied Mrs. Charlton; "but really, my dear Sir, I have so many accounts to look over, and different other things to do, that Louisa must do without a chaperon for once, especially when she is going to her guardian's house. Alfred tells me that you have been to see him, doctor, for which I am very much obliged."

"I thought it a duty, my dear Lady," replied Dr. Western; "the accounts that reached me were so alarming that I feared I should find him very ill. There is little the matter, however, but a few bruises, as far as I could discover; and I should think you could bring him home quite safely to-morrow."

"Do you really think so?" asked Mrs. Charlton, in a tone of surprise.

"I think that the sooner he is out of that house the better," replied the rector; "the people there are amongst the worst in the parish, and I know this: I myself would sooner risk a fever than sleep there for a single night."

Before Mrs. Charlton could reply, the door was thrown open to announce dinner, and the rector, advancing, gave her his arm, while Morton followed with Louisa. What was it he whispered to her as they went down stairs? Can you not divine, reader?—Then you have never been in love in all your life.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Mother Brown's cottage was certainly by no means a pleasant place — on the contrary, it was a very unpleasant place indeed, and yet thither must I once more lead the gentle reader, though I have no intention of dirtying the shoes of his imagination more than I can help in guiding him on his way.

In the outer chamber of the cottage, which, as the reader is aware, was divided into four rooms, two above and two below, and by the side of the large ill-constructed chimney, sat Tom Brown, the widow's son, with an old yellow greasy tobacco pipe in his mouth, puffiing away clouds of no very fragrant smoke, and gazing vacantly into the fireplace, where, over a handful of small drift coal, apparently of not the most combustible nature in the world, stood a large iron pot, emitting an odour of turnips and onions. There was something dull and yet fierce in the man's look: a dogged sullen brutality, more revolting to look upon than even the expression of more dangerous qualities, when lighted up by the beams of intellect and the fire of passion. He was a powerful fellow, as I have before described him; with a head immensely capacious and round behind; but so low and narrow in the forehead that his bristly hair reached within a finger's length of his eye-brows; and as he sat there, though sometimes a momentary smile would change the expression of his dull face, yet in general a heavy frown still further contracted that meaningless and animal

forehead. It is not necessary to inquire what emotions produced either the frown or the smile — certain it is that they could be of no very refined kind; but their course was soon after interrupted by the entrance of Williams, who spoke with him for a moment or two by the fire, and then turned towards the door which led into the inner chamber.

"Ah!" said Tom Brown, "there he lies on his back, like a dead crow, when he 's just as well as you or I, Jack. Well, I shall go and take a walk — I wonder what the devil he keeps lying there for?"

"He knows what he 's about," answered Williams; "but don't you go far, Tom, for we may want you. Where 's your mother?"

"Oh, she 's gone down to Mallington to buy some pork," replied her son. "I shan't be further than the top of the common; but I think there may be a rabbit or two by this time;" and thus saying he walked out of the door, and closed it behind him.

Jack Williams in the meantime entered the room where Alfred Latimer lay; and the moment that he appeared the young gentleman started up in his bed, without any sign of pain or sickness, exclaiming "Well, I 'm devilish glad you 've come at last; I thought you 'd never be here."

"Why, I had a good deal to do," said Williams, "and one can't manage obstinate people in a minute, Mr. Latimer; and a precious pig-headed set they are about Mallington — no turning them at all."

"Ay, that 's what my mother said of me this morning," rejoined the young gentleman. "She was over here with the carriage, by eleven, and wanted me to go back to the house; for she and that old fool Western have been laying their heads together, and settling that this was a very bad place for me to stay in, so that, fever or no fever, I ought to be brought over to Mallington, like a sick boy from school. I wouldn't go, however; and then, just to drive me, she said she couldn't spare Wilkinson any longer."

"What did you say to that?" demanded Jack Williams.

"Why, I said I could spare him very well," answered Alfred Latimer, "and so sent him about his business, glad enough to get rid of him. I promised to come over to-morrow, however; so whatever is to be done must be done to-night."

"Oh, I 've got all ready," replied Jack Williams, "if you are strong enough."

"I 'm quite well," replied Alfred Latimer. "There 's nothing the matter with me; but I 've been thinking, Jack, how the deuce we shall get her across the water and through the village without people seeing. She will never be able to walk to the other bridge."

"To be sure not," answered Williams; "that 's what has kept me such a time, for I couldn't hire a punt, all I could do. One fellow said he was sure I was going to poach the river, and he might have his boat seized. However, at last I got hold of young Blackmore, who promised to draw his father's punt in amongst the reeds there; then we can get across in the dusk, without being seen, and have her up to the cottage at Illington in no time. But mind, Mr. Latimer, you 're to marry her, you know."

"Oh, ah! I 'll marry her," replied Alfred Latimer; I 'll marry her — don't you be afraid."

"No, I 'm not afraid," replied Williams; "for I wouldn't help you if I thought you 'd cheat her; and having given me your promise, I look to you to keep it. So, as that 's settled, I 've got a pack of things for you here in the bundle that will make you look as much like a gamekeeper as possible, leather leggings and all; and if you start over the back way just before dusk you 'll find me down by the water. We must get Tom Brown, however, to stay in the boat while we are in the park. It will be awkward, however, if she doesn't come, since you have promised to go home to-morrow."

"If she doesn't I won't go," replied Alfred Latimer. "It will do well enough, and nobody suspect anything, while I am lying here and supposed to be ill; but if I were up at Mallington House, and going about, they 'd say directly I had taken her — but she 'll come, I think."

"So do I," answered Williams; "but there 's Tom Brown come back; I hear his step; and we had better speak to him about it at once."

Thus saying he opened the door that led to the other room; but the man he looked for was not there, and returning to Alfred Latimer's bedside, he sat down again, and pursued the conversation in which they were engaged. In about ten minutes, however, the step of Tom Brown was heard distinctly crossing the floor of the next room in haste, and the moment after he opened the door and put his head in, saying, "I say, Mr. Williams, have you been talking loud with that window open, for there 's been a d—d fellow hanging about on the outside listening, or I am mistaken."

Williams started up with a heavy brow, withou any reply, and, running to the window, looked forth.

"He 's gone, he 's gone," said Tom Brown; "as soon as he saw me come down the hill he was off like a shot."

"Do you know him?" asked Williams.

"I 'm not quite sure," answered Brown, "but I think, by the look of him, that it was that dancing-master looking cove who got his head broke and lost his money one day."

"He may get his head broken to better purpose if he comes listening here," said Williams, and then fell into a train of thought, from which he was roused after a moment or two by Alfred Latimer exclaiming "Why, if he has heard all, our scheme will be blown over the whole place."

"No, no," answered his companion, "he did not hear enough for that. No names were mentioned, you know; and he couldn't make out much of it. However, Tom, you run down to the bridge, and see whether he crosses or not. If we can make sure of him till five o'clock I 'll take care of him after that. He shan't blab till the thing is done, at all events."

"You stay there till Williams comes down to you," said Alfred Latimer, "and 'll give you five shillings for your pains, Brown."

Now, people's estimation of their conscience is very different in different individuals; but, unlike the appreciation of any other

thing, the less a man has of it the less value does he place upon it. What is there on earth that Tom Brown would not have done for five shillings? As to selling his soul, that was no great matter; for, notwithstanding all that Doctor Western could do, he was not quite sure whether he possessed a soul or not; and if he had, the property undoubtedly was deeply mortgaged. But he would have taken the life of another and put his own neck in jeopardy at any time for a pound; and would have risked Botany Bay, the hulks, or the pillory for any of the aliquot parts of the same sum. To watch for a man upon a bridge, therefore, was no very troublesome task; and yet, to say the truth, he would rather have stolen a sheep or a deer, or robbed a garden or a hen-roost; for in the great commerce of this world, whatever Adam Smith may say, there are a great many other kinds of circulating medium besides money; and often a man who undertakes a bad action for a small bribe, ekes out his pitiful pay with excitement. Though there was none of this, however, in the task assigned to him, he agreed to do as he was bid, and set off at once with so rapid a step that he overtook Mr. Gibbs half way down the hill, and saw him enter the inn before he took his station on the bridge. The guard he kept was uninterrupted; for whether it was that the worthy traveller was conscious of being watched, or whether he had some other occupation which kept him within, he did not issue forth again till the figure of Jack Williams was seen walking with a slow pace, and the usual swinging gait of a sailor, down towards the side of the river. No verbal communication took place between the two, but the thumb pointed back over the right shoulder indicated to Tom Brown that he was to go back to the cottage, and Williams, walking into the inn, asked if Mr. Gibbs was at home. The landlady, the ostler, and the barmaid all looked at Jack Williams with a sort of shy and unpleasant aspect, which certainly was not very encouraging; but Mrs. Pluckrose replied civilly that she believed the gentleman was in, and sent to see; while Williams turned his back to the bar, looked out at the door, and twisted a cane switch which he held in his hand into a variety of curious forms.

While pausing there, he saw the carriage of Mrs. Charlton going down the hill towards the rectory, with the sweet counte-

nance of Louisa sitting calmly beside Mr. Morton, very apparent through the windows. There might be a slight glow upon her cheek; but she did not seeem at all anxious to avoid being seen thus publicly with her lover; and Williams himself, as well as the two Misses Martin, and Messrs. Crump and Dixon, looked upon the approaching wedding as a settled thing.

"Well, I declare!" cried Miss Mathilda Martin.

"Bold enough, truly," said Miss Martin; "but what could be expected with such a step-mother?"

"I think his impudence is worse than hers," rejoined Mathilda. "A poor pitiful painter, to set himself up riding in a carriage beside an heiress like that! — I declare I 've a great mind to write and tell the other guardian, in an anonymous kind of way, what Mrs. Charlton is encouraging and Dr. Western suffering."

"Wait a little, Matty," said her sister; "the good lady is a deep one, and we have not seen the end of it yet."

Before this interesting conversation had come to its conclusion, Mr. Williams had been introduced into the chamber of Mr. Gibbs, and a bowl of punch had been ordered, which speedily appeared. Mr. Gibbs, who paid with a degree of regularity for everything he bought which he often wished that others would imitate, drew forth a ten-pound note, and asked the maid who brought the punch to change it; and on her returning with Abraham Newland's promise-to-pay unchanged, he applied to his new companion, but without success. Williams, for some reason, declared that he had no change, though his pocket was very heavy, and the girl civilly insisting that there was no hurry, Mr. Gibbs was obliged to desist. He was courtesy itself to his guest — he plied him with punch, he talked to him incessantly, he mingled soft allusions to the fragrant Balm of Trinidad with expressions of regret at having ever been betrayed into the folly of thinking that a seafaring gentleman like Mr. John Williams could have committed a high-way robbery. Then he talked of Mallington, and all the places round Mallington; and then he spoke of his young friend, Mr. Maltby, and assured his companion that he had endeavoured to bring him to their little party that night, but had not been fortunate

enough to find him, expressing a firm conviction that Mr. Williams would be delighted with his acquaintance.

Williams listened to him with grim gravity; nothing that Mr. Gibbs could say could move him to more than a sardonic smile; and when the worthy traveller commended Bill Maltby, he merely replied that he had known him very well when he was a youth, and asked where he "hung out" now. In short, Jack Williams was an old bird, and was not to be caught with chaff such as Mr. Gibbs threw down before him. On the Balm of Trinidad, however, he was somewhat more discursive; and when they had well nigh got to the bottom of their bowl of punch, he began to twist upon his finger the long ringlets that hung over his whiskers, and inquired particularly into the merits of that fragrant essence. It was a subject upon which Mr. Gibbs was eloquent, and he enumerated some nineteen or twenty of its admirable qualities, some of them diametrically opposed to the others, till at length Mr. Williams felt in his pocket and asked the price, producing at the same time a crown piece. The ruling passion strong in death showed Mr. Gibbs the opportunity of doing a little business, and, unable to resist, he said, "The retail price was in truth seven-and-six-pence, but he would pass it to his friend Mr. Williams at the wholesale rate of five shillings."

"Well, then, let us have a bottle!" exclaimed Jack Williams, giving another coxcomb twist to the corkscrew curl.

Immediately Mr. Gibbs started up from the table; and approaching a large leather-covered brass-banded case, which stood in the window, he dived into the interior thereof to bring up a bottle of the Balm of Trinidad. As he was doing so he heard the ladle rattle in the bowl, and turned his head round, when he saw Mr. Williams helping himself to some more punch.

"I've taken the liberty, Mr. Gibbs," said Jack Williams, in a slow tone, "to drink your health during your absence. Shall I fill your glass to return thanks?"

"Thank you, I'm coming back directly," said Mr. Gibbs; and, returning to the table, he presented his companion with a bottle of the fragrant balm, wrapped up in gold paper, received

his crown piece, and, filling himself a glass of punch — it was well nigh the last that the bowl contained — he drank it off.

Jack Williams in the meanwhile went on sipping his own, opening the bottle of fragrant balm, pulling out the cork, and smelling the odour with the air of a connoisseur. Mr. Gibbs then proposed another bowl, and Mr. Williams readily consented. The maid was summoned, the empty vessel carried away, and another replete with fragrant liquor speedily placed upon the table. By this time, however, the eyes of Mr. Gibbs had acquired a somewhat glassy and lackadaisical expression. He helped himself and his guest, however, and tossed off his own glass; but then his eyelids seemed to grow heavy, and in a few minutes he began to nod; upon which Jack Williams gave him a meaning smile, and taking up the bowl, half emptied it at a draught. He then sat for about half an hour longer to watch the progress of his entertainer's sleep. It was sound, and apparently comfortable, and Jack Williams more than once rubbed his finger on the corner of his brow and temple, as if considering what was to be done next.

The Caliph Haroun Alraschid had a certain powder — we are informed in one of the most veracious of all possible histories — of which, when he wished to send any of his friends to sleep, he used to take a pinch and drop it into their wine or sherbet, as the case might be, and instantly they fell into a pleasant doze, during the continuance of which, the aforesaid potentate used to do with them whatsoever he thought fit. Now, whether Jack Williams, in his travels in the East, had possessed himself or not of the Caliph's secret, certain it is that he intended Mr. Gibbs to go to sleep, and that Mr. Gibbs dutifully complied with his desire. At length, as the sky was beginning to get a little grey, Williams rose, and taking up the worthy traveller in his arms, laid him quietly on his bed; then descending the stairs he stopped a minute at the bar, saying to Mrs. Pluckrose, "You 've made that punch devilish strong, màrm, and Gibbs has got as drunk as an owl."

"Good gracious me!" cried the worthy landlady, "I hope he 's not noisy."

"Oh, no," answered Williams, "he 's fallen sound asleep,

and left me to drink out the bowl; but I find my head queerish, too, and so I 'll have no more of it. Good night, marm," and away he went.

Mrs. Pluckrose and the maid immediately proceeded to ascertain the facts of the case; and finding the worthy traveller stretched upon his bed, apparently in a state of drunken sleep, they left him there, only taking the precaution of putting some towels under his boots that they might not dirt the counterpane.

It was well nigh two o'clock next day before Mr. Gibbs woke; and then he was mightily sick at his stomach, and his head was aching in a very unpleasant manner. He vowed, however, that he had not been drunk at all; but this only confirmed the good landlady's belief in his inebriety of the night before, for she had remarked on more than one occasion amongst her guests, and also in the case of her dear departed lord and master, that no man is ever so convinced of having been thoroughly sober, as when he has been thoroughly tipsy.

CHAPTER XXXII.

It was a very pleasant little drive from Mallington House to the rectory, both for Edmond Morton and Louisa Charlton, and yet it would be very difficult to say in what its pleasantness consisted. They spoke very little, so that it could not be in conversation. They were aware that the eyes of the villagers were upon them, and therefore it was not in what is commonly called making love. Louisa felt a little awkwardness in thus first appearing with her lover alone, and therefore it was not in that ease and freedom from restraint which in itself is an enjoyment. It could only be, then, in being together, but that was something, and something very pleasant too. It connected itself by the fine links of thought with a future, when they should be always together — when heart and hand united, and yet separate, they should go along the varied paths of life, mutually enjoying the sunshine, and cheering each other in the shade.

As the picture rose up to the eye of hope, and fancy watered the flowers of the future, Louisa once or twice raised her beautiful

confiding eyes to her lover's face, and read in it a promise of happiness that she felt sure would never be belied; and Morton, as if he read every thought that was passing within, and sought to confirm the happy confident dream of fancy, laid his hand gently upon hers without uttering a word, but with the silent voice of the eyes, more convincing than oaths or protestations.

When they reached the rectory, strange to say, both were more at ease in their demeanour to each other than they had been when alone. Dr. Western knew their love, and they were aware that Mrs. Evelyn knew it too, so there was no need of concealment, and there was none. They were both too bright and fine minded, indeed, to let the passion in their hearts obtrude itself upon the notice of others — but yet it was pleasant, very pleasant, so to feel, and so to act, beneath the eyes of those who knew and approved; and the quiet simple dinner at the rectory passed over in calm and pleasant conversation, natural, straight-forward, true, affording a strange contrast to the somewhat laboured and artificial sort of life which had established itself at Mallington House since Mrs. Charlton had become its mistress.

As soon as dinner was over, Dr. Western proposed to his young friend that they should set out upon their walk; and having taken their hats and sticks, they issued forth from the rectory, and bent their steps towards the bridge. It was a calm and placid evening, with the sun already low behind the trees, though where the woody screen fell away in parts, the glowing sky beyond showed that the orb of day was still above the horizon. The river lay calm and flooded with light, beneath them, as they passed over towards the gates of the park, and as they paused for a moment to gaze down upon the reflection of the banks in the water, they saw a boat pushed across from one side of the stream to the other, above half a mile lower down. There was nothing, however, to attract their attention in the appearance of the boat, and after a few words on the beauty of the scene, they pursued their way through the gates up towards the hall. Their conversation as they went seemed grave and earnest: more than once the clergyman and his companion stopped; and the outstretched finger and eager look showed that the subject discussed was one of interest to both. At length,

however, when within about five hundred yards of the house, they turned from their course, and bent their steps towards the park-keeper's cottage, which they reached just as the sun set. Opening the door, without ceremony, Dr. Western led the way in, and looked around; but the only person the little room contained was Mrs. Edmonds, busily engaged in preparing supper for her husband and children. She smiled and curtseyed on seeing the rector; and, in reply to his question, said that Edmonds was up at the hall, having gone to speak with Mrs. Chalke, the housekeeper, in regard to some men who had been seen prowling about. Dr. Western sat down for a minute or two, and inquired in a careless tone for his young friends, Lucy and John.

"Oh, John is tending the fowls," replied the mother; "and Lucy has gone down with a few eggs to poor Janet Hazlewood: she is late this evening. I wish she would come back."

"She should be in before dark, Mrs. Edmonds," said Dr. Western, in a grave tone; "and as you say that there are strange men about the place, if you would take my advice, you would send her brother with her for a day or two, whenever she goes out."

"I will, Sir," replied the park-keeper's wife.

She looked earnestly in the rector's face, as if there were questions she would fain have asked; but either from timidity, or some vague apprehension, she did not put them; and soon after Dr. Western and his young companion bade her good evening, and walked back towards the hall. It was now nearly dark, and a twinkling star was here and there appearing in the sky, when suddenly Morton stopped, and said, "I thought I heard a scream."

"I heard a jay in the wood," replied Dr. Western; but nevertheless they waited and listened. No other sound, however, broke the silence of the air, and, after pausing for a few moments, they followed the path to the house. The great door of the hall was opened for them by Edmonds himself; but, although they had been down to his house to seek him, neither of the two gentlemen seemed to have any particular matter to communicate, for they merely told him to bring them a light into the library, and turned their steps thither themselves.

"I will see him to-morrow," said Dr. Western, "and tell him

privately, when I can admonish him a little, for though an excellent man, there is a certain degree of sternness about him which might drive the poor child to further imprudence, if not to evil."

A minute after Edmonds entered with a light, and merely saying to Morton in a respectful tone that he would wait till that gentleman was at leisure, for he wished to speak with him for a moment, the park-keeper retired and shut the door. The dim light of the tallow candle which had been brought penetrated with difficulty the obscurity of the large old fashioned room, and glared faintly upon the backs of innumerable volumes on the shelves. Dr. Western, however, walked direct to one corner of the library, and took down a thick quarto on which was inscribed the words "History of — shire."

"Oh, I have seen that, my dear Sir," said Morton, with a smile; "I looked all through it before I left London, but it throws no light upon that part of the subject."

"What an impatient thing is youth," replied the worthy clergyman, "and how it jumps to conclusions!" and laying down the book upon the long table, he opened it and turned over several pages. Besides the printed matter which it contained, there was now displayed upon the broad margin numerous annotations, written in a small clear hand, and each signed by a single name. Between the leaves, too, were several scraps of written paper, some of which Morton barely looked at and passed over; but at one he paused, and read the whole contents with great attention, and then, turning to Dr. Western, he shook him by the hand, saying, "This is all that could be desired, indeed! How, in the name of good fortune, did you discover it, my dear Sir?"

"By a very simple process," replied Dr. Western; "my predecessor at Mallington was a great antiquarian and genealogist. At his death I bought his books, and amongst the rest there fell into my hands a manuscript account of this part of the country. On looking in that, to see if I could find a clue to what you wanted to obtain, I met with numerous references to this book, and especially to the notes and memoranda of Lord Mallington, after this fashion: — 'In History of — shire, Mallington Park Library:

the earl's MS. illustrations.' I came up yesterday morning, and very soon satisfied myself that here was the information required."

"I must have a copy of this!" said Morton; who, like many another man, had fallen into a fit of musing upon a very different subject, while listening to an explanation which he had himself desired. "I suppose that it would be hardly justifiable to take the original."

"I do not see why," replied Dr. Western; "but as a copy will do as well, you had better keep on the right side. We will get a pen and ink, and then half an hour will suffice to transcribe it."

Dr. Western moved towards the door as he spoke, but ere he reached it, Edmonds, the park-keeper, entered with a face a little pale, and that expression in his eyes which can only be called intense anxiety. "I am afraid, Sir, I must go away," he said, addressing Morton; "for my boy has just come up to tell me that Lucy is not yet at home — I don't understand it, Sir — I must go and see."

He evidently strove to speak calmly, but the father's apprehensions would have way, and his voice trembled, and his lip quivered, while he mentioned the intelligence he had received. Dr. Western and Morton looked at each other with a grave and meaning glance; and Morton, closing the book before them, said, in a low tone of voice, to the rector, "We can do this to-morrow. Let us go with him. He may need support and assistance."

Dr. Western nodded his head, and, turning towards the park-keeper, said, in as easy a tone as he could assume, "We will go with you, Edmonds; but don't make yourself uneasy, my good man. Your wife told us that Lucy had gone down to poor old Janet Hazlewood's. Something may have occurred to detain her."

The man looked earnestly in Dr. Western's face, but he made no reply, for there was suspicion in his heart which he did not dare utter to any one else till it grew into certainty. The good old housekeeper, who had followed him into the hall, took the candle and closed the door after they had gone out; and, directing their course across the park towards a spot where the trees came nearly down to the river side, about two hundred yards' distance

from the gates, they turned towards the marshy piece of ground where Williams and Lucy Edmonds had met the day before.

"Is there no other path she could have taken in coming home," asked Morton, speaking to Edmonds, who had not uttered a word since they had left the hall; but with his eyes bent forward to see if he could catch a glimpse of her coming form through the darkness of the night, had gone on in silence a few steps before the two gentlemen.

"She might take the gravel walk there that runs through the trees above," said Edmonds, "but I don't think it likely, Sir."

"Then I will go that way," said Morton; "where does it join the other path?"

"Close by the osiers, Sir," answered the park-keeper; and Morton, turning away, hurried on to the spot where the gravel walk which Edmonds had mentioned entered the thicker wood, and then pursued it as fast as he could go till it came to the side of the swamp. During the last thirty or forty yards, he could hear the voices of Dr. Western and the park-keeper speaking earnestly together, but they ceased as soon as he joined them, and, examining the ground to the right and the left as they proceeded, the whole party walked on till they came to the park-wall. There was no gate nor door at that spot, but a little flight of wooden steps up one side of the wall and down the other, soon brought them to the sandy lane beyond where two or three cottages were seen by the side of the road. The yellow light was gleaming out from the windows of more than one of these lowly habitations, and advancing to a door that stood exactly opposite, Edmonds opened it and went in, followed close by Dr. Western and Mr. Morton. The park-keeper cast a quick and eager glance around into every corner of the room; but Lucy Edmonds was not there. There was an old and sickly woman sitting in a large wicker-chair by the side of the little fireplace, and another woman of the same class about forty years of age busily making her some tea; but the form he looked for did not meet the poor man's eye, and his heart sunk.

"So Lucy is not here, good dame?" he said, speaking to the sick woman, as both the tenants of the cottage turned round in some surprise at the entrance of so numerous a party.

"Oh, dear, no, Mr. Edmonds," said Dame Hazlewood, "she 's gone home."

"She 's been gone well nigh an hour," said the other woman.

Edmonds pressed his two hands tight together, but uttered not a word. Yet the expression of anguish and alarm in his face instantly struck the woman who had last spoke, and she exclaimed, "Has the poor dear not come home?"

"No," answered Edmonds; "no, nor is she on the way."

"Perhaps you did not take the same path, Mr. Edmonds," replied the younger woman; "you might pass very close to each other without knowing it. I 'm sure as I came down an hour or so ago I should have never known that any one was along the other walk, if young Mr. Latimer had not come through the trees, and said, "Is that you, Jack?"

"Mr. Latimer is sick in bed at Brown's cottage, my good lady," said Morton, advancing. "You must be mistaken."

"Oh, no, Sir," answered Dame Hazlewood's friend. "I saw him with my own eyes. He was oddly dressed, to be sure, as if he didn't wish to be known; but I 'd swear to him anywhere."

"I think there must be an error," said Dr. Western; but before he could conclude the sentence, Edmonds, with a flashing eye and a burning cheek, broke in upon his speech, exclaiming, "No, no, no! It was he, sure enough. The villain has robbed me of my child — I know all about it. He has corrupted her heart, and condemned her soul; and God's curse and her father's be upon both their heads!"

Dr. Western laid his hand upon his arm, saying, with a grave brow and solemn tone, "Forbear, forbear!"

"I cannot, Sir — I cannot!" cried Edmonds, furiously. "He has made her lie to me; he has perverted as pure and good a girl as ever lived. She has had warning — she has had counsel — she has had her father's commands; but she has neither honoured his nor God's. All by the persuasion of this black villain!

Curses upon him — ay, and upon her too, and may they light upon my head if ever I see her again! I will go home — I will go home, and break my poor wife's heart with this news," and, without waiting for remonstrance or reproof, he flung out of the cottage, crossed the road mounted the stile, and entered the park.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MORTON and the clergyman stood silent in the cottage for several moments after Edmonds had left them; the countenance of each was grave and sad; but though that of the rector, perhaps, expressed more sorrow, his companion's showed traces of anger and indignation in the contracted brow and flushed cheek.

"This young man is incorrigible, I fear," said Morton, after a pause. "With such warnings as he has had in various ways, to see him take the first moment of returning health to ruin an innocent girl and break her father's heart, shows a spirit too corrupt and perverted to admit even the hope of reformation."

"We must always hope," replied Dr. Western, "but this indeed is very bad. I know not well what is to be done; for in order to rescue this unhappy girl from his hands, if she be inclined to stay with him, we ought to have her father's sanction."

"Had we not better follow him to his house?" asked Morton. "Perhaps, by reason and admonition, my dear Sir, you might induce the poor man to think better of this affair, and take the only means that can be devised for saving his child. They cannot have taken her far."

"It is in vain to talk to him to-night," said Dr. Western. "His mind is in a state that will not bear it; and, whether the law will justify me or not, I must take his consent for granted, and on my own responsibility issue a warrant against those who are supposed to have carried off this unhappy girl. We cannot tell as yet whether she has been wholly consenting, and at all events, being under age, her father can claim her."

"I am sure it was the young gentleman from Mallington House," joined in the woman who was in attendance upon Dame Hazlewood; "that I can swear to any where."

"Then come up to the rectory early to-morrow, Mrs. Wilson," said Dr. Western; "I will issue the warrant to-night at all risks, but in the mean time inquire amongst your neighbours as to which way Lucy and her seducer went, and if you gain any information let me know. They could not have gone out by the great gates or we must have met them."

"And they did not come over the stile, I am sure," said Mrs. Wilson, "for the door hadn't been shut two minutes before you came in, Sir."

"Do you remember having seen a boat cross the river?" asked Morton.

Dr. Western bowed his head with a meaning look, but merely replied "We had better get home as soon as possible. Remember to send me any information you may obtain, Mrs. Wilson, without a moment's delay."

The good woman promised to obey, and the two gentlemen quitting the cottage, returned through the park, conversing over what had taken place.

"This is sad, very sad indeed," said Dr. Western; "and these are the things, my dear young friend, which form the most painful parts of a clergyman's existence; to see every admonition and every effort to check the wild course of passion and folly by the restraints of religion, vain and empty; to see the young go on in vice and wickedness, and the old often die in impenitence and sin; to witness men heaping on their heads misery and wretchedness, in this world and the next; and to commit to the earth from which we sprung the body of those for whom we dare hardly hope for salvation hereafter. They are every-day occurrences and very bitter."

"They must be so, indeed," replied Morton, "but yet there must be many subjects of consolation, too. Some you must be the means of saving, some of reclaiming and leading to repentance."

"Too few," answered Dr. Western, with a sigh, "far too few; and when I come to ask myself — if such vices and crimes produces feelings of grief and even of anger in a sinful mortal creature like myself, what they must be in the eyes of a being

pure, wise, and holy like God — I feel almost overwhelmed at the contemplation; and the burden of the great responsibility undertaken by any one who attempts to teach and lead his fellow creatures seems far more vast and weighty than, in the light short-sightedness of our hearts, we are inclined to think it. I believe that if I had had a due sense of all the important duties and great requirement of an ecclesiastic's life, in those early days when I was ordained, I should have shrunk from the task, from a consciousness of my own inadequacy. But, alas! my dear Sir, men enter the church as an occupation, as a profession, as a means of livelihood or of advancement; and rarely, very rarely, consider duly what it is they put their hand to. Here, this poor girl, Lucy, she has been a regular attendant upon my church. I have spoken with her and her family often in private. I have endeavoured to give them on all occasions such counsel and admonition as I thought would lead them right; and yet, when I find her quitting the paths of virtue, disregarding her parents' commands, and forgetting the precepts of her God, I cannot but fear that I have not done enough, and that a share of this sin may rest with me for negligence."

"Nay, nay, my dear friend," replied Morton; "such, I am sure, is not the case. You must remember that prophets and preachers from the beginning of time have striven in vain to banish sin from the world, and restrain the force of human passion. All that we can do is to labour as far as we have strength; and very often that labour will be unsuccessful. But perhaps," he continued, willing to lead the conversation away from the points that were most painful to his companion, "we may be judging harshly of this poor girl — we may be even doing wrong to Alfred Latimer himself. That good woman may be mistaken, or, if not, some violence may have been used. Do you not remember I thought I heard a scream as we were walking from the park-keeper's cottage up to the Hall?"

"I do, I do," answered Dr. Western, "and though it may seem strange to say so, I would rather have it as you suppose than otherwise — I would rather have this poor Lucy injured in body than in spirit — I would rather that the wicked should add

another crime to many gone before than that one hitherto pure and innocent should fall into vice."

"I can understand you perfectly, my dear friend," replied Morton; "but in regard to Alfred Latimer, do not let us give way too much to prejudice. This Mrs. Wilson may, as I have said, be in error. She saw the person whom she suspects to have been him but for a moment. It was nearly dark when she met him; he has no good reputation with the country people any more than with ourselves; and the resemblance may have been fanciful entirely. This morning he was certainly ill in bed; and I think it will be best, while you return home and take measures for apprehending those who have committed this outrage, for me to walk up to the common, and ascertain whether he be really there or not. Till that is ascertained our dear Louisa had better not be informed of what has occurred, as it would only fill her with painful suspicions, which after all may be unfounded."

Dr. Western offered some opposition to his young companion's plan, alleging that he might involve himself in a quarrel with Alfred Latimer, which might have very painful consequences; but Morton, sure of his own calmness and self-command, persisted in his design, and they walked on together towards the little town of Mallington, where all was calm and tranquil, the lights shining forth from the windows, and many of the inhabitants standing out before their doors, or strolling through the street to enjoy the sweet air of a night scarcely touched with the approach of autumn. The moon was rising large and round, as the two gentlemen crossed the bridge; and her light struggling with some clouds, as she ascended the arch of heaven, fell in patches of wavy silver upon the waters, and on the broad leaves of the water lilies that here and there spread out from the banks; but neither Morton nor Dr. Western had any inclination to pause and gaze at a prospect which at another time they might have stayed long to contemplate. The heart of each felt too dark and gloomy for the beauty of the scene to find its way in; and hurrying on into Mallington, Morton left the worthy rector at the inn to summon the constables of the place, and take such other measures as were necessary for the restoration of Lucy Edmonds to

her home, while he himself walked on up the hill, and with a rapid pace bent his steps to the cottage of the Widow Brown. As he went he met several men returning from work at a distance, and when the moon shone out so that they could see the general appearance of the gentleman whom they passed, they civilly gave him goodnight, with that decent respect for superior station which was then general, and is not altogether extinguished in England; but the clouds still from time to time completely covered the fair planet, and even the sandy path from the high road to the cottage was then with difficulty to be distinguished.

At the door of Widow Brown's house Morton knocked before he entered, and at first no answer was returned; but upon repeating the summons the voice of the old woman herself was heard in a harsh tone exclaiming "Come in! Why the devil do you stand knocking there?"

On Morton's entrance she seemed both surprised and annoyed, but changed her tone to a more civil one as she asked what was his pleasure.

"I wish to see Mr. Latimer, my good dame," replied Morton; "shall I find him in the next room?"

Mother Brown hesitated, and, probably, if she had possessed any means of preventing her visitor from satisfying himself she would have said that the young gentleman was asleep. Certain it is that lie first rose to her lips; but remembering that she was alone, and could not stop Mr. Morton from going on into the adjoining room if he thought fit, she replied "He has gone out upon the common, Sir, to take a little walk in the moonlight. He thought it would do him good, poor gentleman."

With this confirmation of the suspicions which had been entertained against Mrs. Charlton's son, Morton did not think fit to ask any more questions, but merely answering "Well, tell him I called to see him," he turned and left the cottage.

There had been a light within, and a cloud was just coming over the moon, the silvery edge resting half over her disc affording a gleam of light, which lasted but a moment, however, till the dark vapour swept across and cast its shadows upon the earth. During that moment Morton thought that he caught sight

of a man's head and shoulders just rising above the edge of the neighbouring pit; but he was not one easily to apprehend any danger, and he walked quietly on, merely noticing that the figure disappeared more suddenly than could be accounted for by the increased darkness produced by the cloud; for the brightness of the sky around afforded sufficient light to see, though indistinctly. Scarcely had he passed the spot, however, where the man's head and shoulders had appeared, when he heard a sound like gravel falling from the bank into the pit below, under the tread of some one springing up, and he was instinctively turning round towards the side whence the noise proceeded when he received a violent blow on the head which laid him stunned and bleeding on the ground.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

What a strange thing it would be if, even for a brief period, we could see at one glance all the manifold operations that are going on around us, and are destined to affect the course of our life — to bring us weal or woe, to lead us to right or wrong, to raise us to fortune, or to sink us in adversity. How many minute and apparently trifling causes should we see working their way towards us, swelling as they come, like the avalanche, from the size of a pebble to the magnitude of a mountain; first rolling slowly, as if they would never have force to continue their course, and then sweeping on like lightning, and overwhelming all obstructions. Such a view of the causes which form our fate, however, is wisely and beneficently denied to mortal man; and it is only when deeds have been done and paths chosen, when events have occurred and consequences are inevitable, that we can turn our eyes towards the sources of the things that are, and trace the stream of circumstances that surround us, back towards the fountain head. Such also must be my course in regard to the events of the night of which we have just been speaking; and we must look back for an hour or two, dear reader, to the period when about sunset a boat crossed the river from the Mallington side to the sedgy piece of ground, which we have more than once alluded

to as that where Lucy Edmonds first met her lover's daring and criminal companion.

The boat reached the shore, and was drawn into a little sort of muddy creek, where several large old willows hid it from observation. There, one of the two men which it contained jumped on shore; and the other, stretching himself out in the bottom of the punt, laid his head upon the raised part of the stern, and seemed to dispose himself to sleep. The other — in whom it required an eye well acquainted with his person to recognise Alfred Latimer — walked on, winding amongst the osiers, and choosing the firmer parts of the ground, till he reached the path. Thence, after looking round him for a minute or two, he crossed through the shrubs and underwood to the other footway, down which, as we have seen, Mr. Morton had come in the search for Lucy. There he paused for some minutes, looking up the path with an impatient glance, and muttering to himself with an oath, "Jack Williams is devilish late — I wonder what is keeping him. If Lucy should come first, I doubt that I should get her to the boat. It will soon be getting dark, and she won't stay out late I 'm sure. Hark! there 's a step," and, hurrying through the trees again, he exclaimed, incautiously, "Is that you, Jack?"

The moment he beheld Dame Wilson, however, he withdrew before he thought she could notice him, and then listened for her retreating footfalls till he was certain she must have left the spot. He then turned along the path for a few steps in the direction of the Hall, retrod his path again, and was once more wheeling round, when, without having heard any one approach, he found Jack Williams by his side.

"Why this isn't the place, Mr. Latimer," said Williams in a low voice; "If you don't mind what you 're about she will pass without your seeing her; quick, get through the trees, and look out on that other road."

"Come along, then," said Alfred Latimer, "I did not know which path it was upon."

"No, go yourself first," replied Williams, in the same quick manner; "try to persuade her first, gently, before we use force; I will be close at hand."

The young gentleman, following this counsel, crossed once more through the trees, while Williams hid himself in the brush-wood and listened. Several minutes elapsed, however, before Lucy herself appeared, and Alfred Latimer was beginning to think that she must have passed, when he suddenly caught sight of her coming with faint and agitated steps along the side of the marsh. He instantly sprang forward to meet her; but though joy at seeing him again was upon poor Lucy's countenance, her first words were — "Oh! Mr. Latimer, I promised never to meet you again."

"You have done so by accident, Lucy," said Alfred Latimer, taking her hand, and pressing it in his; "they cannot blame you; and, indeed, if you would be wise, and loved me as I once thought you did, no one would have any right to blame you — for you would now be my wife."

"Oh, Alfred!" replied Lucy, looking up in his face with a reproachful glance, "you know too well" — but she did not finish the sentence, and he went on.

"You would have me believe that you do love me, Lucy," he said; "but how can I think so when, for a mere rash whim of your father's — a hatred of me without a cause — you not only make me miserable, but drive me to all sorts of rash things. See what your unkindness has already brought about. Have I not quarrelled with my mother, quitted her house, gone to London, half ruined myself, and then, in coming down like a madman to seek you because I was informed that your father was going to marry you to another, have I not been dashed almost to pieces?"

Poor Lucy wept, but through her tears she answered, "No, no, Alfred; I will never marry another."

"Then be mine now, dearest Lucy," replied Alfred Latimer, pressing her closer to him. "We have now the opportunity. Do not let us lose it. And then my heart will be at rest, and no one can tease you any more to be another's wife when you love me. I have a boat here close at hand, which will carry us across the river in two minutes. Then I have got the pretty cottage for you that stands away at the back of the common where you can be

quiet and peaceable all night, and to-morrow we can go away to a distance and be married immediately — come, dear Lucy, come!"

"Oh, no, no!" murmured Lucy Edmonds, striving to free herself from his arms as he would have drawn her towards the river side, "I must not — I dare not, Alfred."

"What, when I have risen from a sick bed to come and ask you at the risk of life!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer, impetuously. "Is this love, Lucy? Is this affection?"

"You know I love you," she answered, "but my father — my mother — I cannot, I ought not — oh, I do love you truly, but" —

At that moment Williams appeared suddenly from amongst the trees, and though his touch was not rough as he took her by the arm, the surprise and terror of the moment, called a scream from her lips.

"Come, come, Miss Edmonds," he said, "there is no use of resisting — one can see well enough how your heart leads you, and it is too late to fight with it now. Besides, you must come; Mr. Latimer has promised to marry you in my hearing, and he will keep his word. Do not keep us here till people come, and we get into a row, where some of us may lose our lives. Do kindly what you must do, and think what would befal if your father were to come up just now."

As he spoke he aided Latimer in drawing her along towards the boat, but his last words seemed to have more effect on Lucy Edmonds than anything else. Before, she had resisted, though but feebly; but at the thought of her father's appearance at that moment, and all the consequences that might ensue, she murmured, "Oh, Heaven forbid!" and looked wildly round, suffering them to lead her on without further opposition. In another minute she was seated in the punt, which was immediately pushed off by the man Brown, and was soon in the midst of the river. Supported by Alfred Latimer, she sat with her hands covering her eyes, and the tears streaming through her fingers as the boat glided over the chequered surface of the waters, now rippling in the moonlight, now shadowed by the clouds. It took but a minute or two to cross,

and as soon as the punt touched the ground, and the man Brown had jumped out and moored it by the chain, Alfred Latimer carried rather than led the poor girl to the shore, and then endeavoured to support her trembling form upon his arm. But Lucy could hardly stand, and was still less able to walk, so that they were obliged to pause for a minute or two, nearly at the spot where Louisa Charlton had plunged in to save the unhappy girl's brother, while Alfred Latimer endeavoured to soothe her agitation, and Williams brought some water from the stream to sprinkle in her face, lest she should faint. They had not been long there when they heard the sound of voices from the other side. Lucy recognised her father's tones; but it was too late now she thought to hesitate or to resist. The die was cast; her fate for weal or woe was sealed, and the voice which had once been so pleasant to her ear, now brought nothing but terror; yet it was the terror which gives strength, and not which overpowers, and with a great effort she said, "I can go! I can go! Oh, Heaven! do not let them find us."

With her lover supporting her on one side, and Williams on the other — while the man Brown followed lest his aid should be needed — Lucy advanced along the road which led towards the back of the common, with her heart beating fearfully and her breath coming short. As they began to ascend the hill, however, she was obliged to pause again, and clinging to the arm of Alfred Latimer, now her only trust and support, she leaned her head upon his shoulder, saying, "A moment, Alfred, a moment — I will go on again in a moment."

They all stopped in silence, and as they waited the gay sound of village mirth reached them from Mallington.

Oh, how sad it came upon poor Lucy's ear! It seemed to tell her with a prophetic voice that the light laugh, the joyous merriment, was no more to be her portion upon earth — that she was given over to heart-sinking despondency, to self-reproach and sadness — that the peace and the pleasure, the calm night, the contented day, the spirit at rest, and the bosom without care, were all gone for ever! But there is something even in such dark and powerful convictions which gives a vigour, though it be the

vigour of despair. She was anxious to fly from all sounds that she had loved, for they seemed to ring the knell of departed days, and saying, in a low tone, "Now, Alfred, I can go," she resumed her way up the hill.

The walk was a long one, for the cottage which Williams had hired for Alfred Latimer was at least two miles distant from Mallington; but Lucy Edmonds stopped no more. She spoke not, indeed; for she was full of the dark thoughts of her fate, and even love could not yet light up hope's lamp again. Latimer strove to cheer her, talked lightly of the future, spoke soothing and endearing words, vowed endless tenderness and affection; and Lucy still clung to him with an eager anxious clasp, which expressed too well how strongly she felt that he was all that was left to her on earth. She knew not to what a reed she trusted.

At length the cottage door was reached, but the windows were all dark and cheerless. There was no light within any more than in her own heart, and though the leaves of the woodbine and the rose climbed over the little trellised porch, and reached their fibres up to the thatch, they seemed like nightshade to poor Lucy Edmonds, as she waited while Williams drew the key from his pocket, and opened the door. He had had everything prepared, however, with some care and neatness. Candles stood upon the table, which were soon lighted, showing a neatly-furnished room and various provisions upon the shelves and tables around. Such attention to her comfort might either have soothed the poor girl's heart, or have shown her that they had calculated with certainty on bringing her there that night; but it was of leaving her father's house she thought, of disobeying his command, of never seeing his face again, of being no longer pressed to her mother's bosom, of the breaking of all the fond ties of youth, of the loss of all the dear affections of early days, — and when she looked around all seemed desolation.

Alfred Latimer led her to a chair, and seated her with her hand in his; but Williams, approaching one of the shelves, took down a bottle of wine, and pouring some out into a glass gave it to her, saying in the kindly tone which sailors generally use to the weak and young, "Come, take that, Miss Edmonds, you are tired

and faint. It will be all well in a day or two, and then when you are his wife your father will forget and forgive, and see things very differently. Come, don't vex yourself; for you may be very happy if you like."

Lucy took the wine and drank it. She would have done anything that they bade her; but the moment after, though the hopes that Williams presented to her mind cheered her for an instant, the voice of the man Brown, who had just entered, made her start and turn round with terror.

"I shouldn't mind a glass, too," he said, "for it 's a long walk. Come, pour us out some, Jack," and his words and his appearance brought a new source of apprehension into Lucy's mind. What were these companions of the man she loved? Who were these familiar friends with whom he consorted? Were these the companions of the son of a high race? Were these the persons he trusted and esteemed?

Williams, however, answered nothing to the ruffian's speech, but spoke eagerly for a few minutes in a low voice to Alfred Latimer, urging him apparently to some course which he did not think fit to pursue. "Well," he said at length, "you are not right — but we had better go. Only remember your promise, Mr. Latimer. Come, Brown," he continued, and seeing the man helping himself to the wine, he gave him a terrible oath, and pushed him out of the cottage.

Lucy Edmonds was left alone with Alfred Latimer. She gazed for a moment or two on his face with a look of deep, earnest, anxious inquiry, then cast herself upon his bosom with a bitter and overpowering burst of tears; but Alfred Latimer was a villain, and without compassion.

In the meantime Williams and his companion, Brown, mounted the little bank under which the cottage lay, and came upon the common above. There was a small public-house at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, at the door of which Brown stopped, declaring that, as he had been bilked of his wine, the other should treat him to a glass of spirits; and, going in, he tossed off more than half a pint of the liquid fire, which is but too readily to be found in such places, partly at his own expense,

partly at that of Williams. He was inclined to stop and gossip with some loose characters whom they found in the parlour; but the superior ruffian with whom he was associated for the time, suspecting that their adventure of that night might not be long a secret if he remained, would not suffer him to do so, but forced him out, after a halt of about five minutes, and took the way with him towards his mother's hut. The man had been drinking before, and the spirits he had taken had some effect, not in inebriating, but in raising his dull and obtuse nature into something approaching a brutal kind of energy.

"Hang me!" he said, as they walked along, "if I should not like to have a spree of some kind to-night. I wish it was the pheasant season, I would clear out Master Edmonds's covers for him while he 's piping after his daughter."

"Go home, and go to bed, you fool," said Williams, in a surly tone. "When you do anything of that kind, have your head clear, and don't go drinking and then talking as loud as a babbling old woman in a passion."

The other man felt his own inferiority sufficiently to be silent, though he was not very well pleased with his companion's word's; and thus they proceeded till they came to the clump of old fir trees, about a couple of hundred yards distant from Mother Brown's dwelling, where her son caught hold of Williams's arm, saying in a lower tone than he had used before "D—n me, if there isn't somebody walking up to the house! If it 's some one come after young Latimer, this job will all be blown."

"Some of the servants, I dare say," replied Williams, looking towards the house, and catching the indistinct outline of a figure coming from the side of Mallington. "I hope your mother won't be fool enough to say he 's out."

"Why, what would you have her say?" asked her son.

"Can't she say he 's asleep?" said Williams; but just then, a gleam of moonlight passing over the figure they had seen, he added, "It doesn't look like a servant either."

"I know who it is," said Tom Brown; "d—n him he is always meddling, and I 'll break his head some day."

"If you mean Gibbs, you are mistaken, Tom," replied Williams, "he is safe enough, that I'll answer for."

"I know what I mean," rejoined the other, in a mysterious tone, "and I can tell you what, if that fellow finds that the young cove is out when every body thinks he 's lying ill at my dam's, you 'll have the whole story ferreted out, and the lass taken back to her father before to-morrow morning. But come into the gravel pit, Jack; and wait till he is gone."

Walking silently along the path, they approached the house, and descended into a pit which lay at the side of the road from Mother Brown's cottage to Mallington. There Williams seated himself at the bottom of the bank; but Brown climbed up till he could see over, and his companion remarked that he sought out a large stone, which he held tight in his right hand, holding by the turf above with his left."

"Come, no nonsense, Tom," said Williams, "let us hear what you are going to be after."

"Nothing; but look out," replied Tom Brown; and immediately added, "he 's gone in."

"A pause of about half a minute ensued, and then the ruffian above said in a low voice to him below, "He has come out again. He has found it all out, or I 'm—;" and, at the same moment, he drew himself back as if about to descend.

There is a consciousness of the growing weight of crime which at times will oppress the most wicked, and Williams felt it at that moment. "Come down, Tom," he said, "no more work to-night. We have enough upon our hands for once." But almost at the same moment Brown scrambled up without reply, and his companion heard a blow and a fall. All was silent, however; and, springing up the bank like a squirrel, Williams stood upon the common just as the moon was coming out again from behind the quick passing cloud. Tom Brown was standing at three or four paces distance; and Morton, with his hat knocked off and lying at some distance, was stretched upon the ground, with his face upon the grass.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE appearance of Dr. Western in the village inn, and his immediately sending for the constable of Mallington, fluttered good poor Mrs. Pluckrose a great deal, nor was her agitation diminished when the worthy clergyman, having taken his seat in a vacant parlour, proceeded to inquire particularly into her knowledge of a certain Jack Williams, and of his usual haunts and places of resort.

"Why, bless you, Sir!" replied the widow; "I know nothing of the man. He never comes here, not he. He knows better, except it be to see somebody lodging in the house, and that I can't help. However, it 's only once that he 's done that, which was this blessed night; and he and the fellow Gibbs got drunk together — that 's to say Gibbs got quite drunk, and he a little worse for liquor. But I could not stop them, you know, Sir, they would have the punch, and indeed I did not take notice of how much they had. Betsey made it and carried it up."

"My good lady," replied Dr. Western, "do not begin to defend yourself before you are accused. The fact is, a very wrong and improper act has been committed this night; and, from information which I have received, I am induced to believe that this man Williams has had some share in it. My questions, therefore, were merely directed to ascertain where he is likely to be found, in order that he himself may be questioned. I must also speak with this Mr. Gibbs, and I wish you would call him down, if he is in the house."

"Lord bless your reverence! he is as drunk as a beast," answered Mrs. Pluckrose. "I never saw no one drunker. However, he 's quiet in his cups, that 's one thing, and as sound asleep as a pig in a sty."

Dr. Western mused, for from Morton's information he had learned that Gibbs had discovered the meeting of Williams and poor Lucy Edmonds, and had hoped to obtain some further intelligence of the traveller. After a moment's thought, however,

he continued his interrogation of the worthy landlady, saying "You tell me this man Williams was here to-night. How long is it since he left your house, Mrs. Pluckrose?"

"It can hardly be an hour, Sir, I should think," answered the hostess.

"Which way did he go?" demanded the rector.

Mrs. Pluckrose put her finger to her temple, as people do when their brain has got a little confused under any circumstances of temporary agitation, and they wish to steady their thoughts, seeming to fancy that it can be done by mechanical pressure. "Oh dear! now I remember," she exclaimed at length; "he went up the village, Sir, towards the hill. He came down and told me that Mr. Gibbs was drunk, and that he wouldn't drink any more, for fear he should be so too. I looked which way he went, and he turned to the right."

"You are sure he did not go over the bridge?" asked Dr. Western.

"He didn't seem as if he was going," replied Mrs. Pluck-rose; "but Bill, the ostler, can tell more, for he was standing outside — Here, Bill! Bill! Where 's Bill, Betsey? — send him in."

Bill, however, only confirmed Mrs. Pluckrose's account. In his estimation, as well as that of many other persons of Mallington, Jack Williams had grown somewhat of a great man since he had returned from sea, altough he had previously been a very little one. The process of this transformation is very easily explained. It was brought about by the same means that affect the opinion of almost every human being in regard to a fellow man—I say almost every human being, I do not say all; for there are some few — perhaps one in forty or fifty thousand—who resist such influences. The fact is, that Williams had come back with a good deal of money, whereas he had gone away with none. Conceive what a vast accession of good qualities this simple fact implied. There is no use denying it — wit, wisdom, honour, honesty, grace, virtue, to nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand of the human race, lie in the small compass of a purse. A poor rogue, in the opinion of almost every one, is the worst of all kinds of

rogues; and a rich rogue — Heaven bless the mark! was there ever such a thing heard of?

However, Jack Williams came home with plenty of money, and spent it with discreet liberality. The ostler, therefore, spoke of him reverentially, and called him Mr. Williams, with due decorum. He assured Dr. Western that Mr. Williams had gone up the street in an easy kind of way, as if he were going home.

"And where is his home?" asked Dr. Western, not yet satisfied.

"Why, you see, your reverence," replied the ostler, "he did use to lodge at Mother Brown's, upon the common, till the young gentleman had the accident, and was taken in there; but since then I here he 's got a room at Pickett's, in the lane just opposite Mallington House."

"Have you seen Mr. Latimer since his return?" was Dr. Western's next question.

"Oh dear, no, Sir," answered the ostler; "he 's seed nobody, as I knows of. He 's very bad, they say."

"Oh dear, no," replied Dr. Western; "he is doing quite well."

While this conversation had been going on Mrs. Pluckrose had been standing by the table, twisting the corner of her clean apron into as many curious forms as a sheet of writing paper is folded into by a certain ingenious gentleman who perambulates the streets of London, but she now ventured to join in for the purpose of informing the rector that Mr. Latimer had certainly seen Jack Williams, inasmuch as she had seen the latter in Mr. Goree's shop, purchasing some cravats for him. While she was conveying this important piece of intelligence the constable made his appearance: a keen stout man, with hawk's nose and a pair of sharp bright eyes, not altogether parallel in their direction. The degree of obliquity which they possessed could hardly be called a squint, for two straight lines, one drawn from the pupil of each, would not have met for some ten or twelve yards; but nevertheless those two traight lines would have met ultimately, and the effect was a certain cunning and not very satisfactory expression, which

conveyed to the mind of the beholder, perhaps wrongly, the idea of a shrewd but not very sincere character. His own interests, of which he had a very tolerable notion, generally kept his conduct, indeed, more straightforward than his look; and, trusting to this tie, Dr. Western and the other magistrates in the neighbourhood generally relied upon him with confidence; nor had they ever hitherto had occasion to repent of so doing. It is true Edmonds, the park-keeper, and the gamekeepers of the late Earl of Malling-ton, had more than once complained of his negligence in dealing with certain suspicious characters; but Harry Soames had always a good excuse in the fact that nothing had been proved against the persons they grumbled at, and that before he could meddle he must have something better than their mere suspicions to go upon.

In the present instance, Dr. Western communicated to him what had taken place, directed him to take two or three stout fellows from the village, and, without the loss of a moment, to use his best endeavours for discovering where poor Lucy Ed-monds had been taken to. He further ordered him, if successful in his search, to bring her to the Rectory, whatever the hour might be, and, moreover, to apprehend any one whom he had reason to believe was a participant in her abduction from her father's protection, and to lodge them in the cage for the night.

Harry Soames scratched his head at the idea of these vigorous measures; "Well, your reverence knows best," he said, "what 's law and what 's not, but if every young man was apprehended for playing the fool with a pretty girl, the cage would be desperate full, I 've a notion. I can't help thinking that Miss Lucy 's gone willingly enough, though your reverence seems to think not. I 've seen young Master Latimer more nor once a-hanging about after her. She was precious fond of him, too, as well she might be of of such a young gentleman. Am I to take him up if I find him with her?"

"You are to make no distinction of persons whatsoever," re-plied Dr. Western, not very well satisfied with his constable's notions of morality. "I suspect, as you do, that Mr. Latimer may have had something to do with this affair, and, although I

have not sufficient proof of the fact to give you a warrant against him, yet I will furnish you with full authority to act in the manner I have directed, and the responsibility will rest upon me, not upon you. Bring me a pen and ink."

While the man was gone, the rector took from his pocket-book some blank warrants, and though, to say the truth, somewhat puzzled how to fill them up in a case of a character with which he was not accustomed to deal, yet, resolved rather to run the risk of overstepping the law than suffer a great wrong to be committed where he could prevent it, he drew the warrant in the best manner he could devise, and placed it in the constable's hands, repeating his order to lose no time, and adding such information as he thought might direct him in his search.

This being done he issued forth from the inn, and, after gazing up the street to see if Mr. Morton was yet returning, he took his way home to the Rectory, where he found that his young friend hat not yet arrived. As may be supposed, the events which had occurred and the business in which he had been engaged, had left a grave and melancholy shade upon his countenance which was remarked both by his sister and Miss Charlton. Each was somewhat surprised, too, to see him return alone; and though Louisa did not venture to inquire the cause of Morton's absence, Mrs. Evelyn did. Her brother's reply, that he had gone to make some inquiries, and would soon rejoin them, satisfied the two ladies that nothing had gone amiss in that quarter; but still the anxious and thoughtful look of the worthy old clergyman, the sudden and expectant turn of his head when he heard the gate bell ring, and the unusual degree of restlessness which he displayed, somewhat alarmed both of his fair companions, and showed them clearly that something was wrong, which he did not think fit to explain.

It had been arranged when Mrs. Charlton's carriage had been sent back, that Dr. Western was to walk up with Louisa and Mr. Morton to Mallington House, about ten o'clock, but that hour had not yet arrived when the sound of a vehicle driving up was heard, and in a minute or two after, the rector's servant announced that the chariot had come for Miss Charlton.

"Why, we told them that we would walk," replied Dr. Western, "and Mr. Morton is not yet returned."

"Mr. Morton is up at the house, Sir," answered the man, "and not very well, so Jones says."

Louisa's cheek turned very pale; and the good clergyman, feeling for her anxiety, and knowing that few evils are equal to suspense, inquired at once "What is the matter; did the coachman say?"

"Why, Sir, he told me," replied the servant, who had not shut his eyes to the attachment between Miss Charlton and the young gentleman of whom he spoke, "that Mr. Morton had been knocked down upon the common, and had been helped home by a man of the name of Williams. Mr. Nethersole had bled him and he was better, and begged Jones to say he was not much hurt."

Louisa Charlton had felt anxieties and apprehensions before now. During the last year of her father's life she had had a daily dread upon her, and her love for him she had thought was as great as it was possible to be for any human being; but those sensations were very different from that which she felt now. Her heart sunk and her spirit seemed to ask itself if this were the beginning of a fresh course of sorrows; if the new path which she had opened for herself, and which to the eye of imagination and hope had seemed all bordered with flowers, was already presenting the thorns that are destined to obstruct all human enjoyment. She did not give way, indeed; the paleness of her cheek and a certain apprehensive look in her beautiful eyes were the only indications which showed to the two kind friends who watched her how deeply she felt. But Dr. Western understood it all, and, laying his hand gently upon her arm, he said "I will go with you, my dear child. I must see into this affair myself. Outrages are becoming somewhat too frequent here, and although I doubt not our young friend is not much hurt, yet measures must be taken for bringing the offenders to justice."

On the way up to Mallington House, which occupied a considerable time from the steepness of the hill, Dr. Western spoke cheerfully to his fair companion, trying to divert her mind from apprehensions for her lover to any other topic. Louisa followed

the direction he gave to the conversation, but it was evident from her replies, though they were calm and reasonable, that her mind was still busy with the one engrossing subject, and at length Dr. Western, returning to it boldly, took her hand in his, saying "Do not alarm yourself unnecessarily, my love. Griefs and anxieties are more or less the portion of every one, but as it is our duty to God to bear them with resignation when they do befal us, so is it our duty to ourselves not to hasten them by anticipation nor increase them by apprehensions."

Louisa replied by assuring him that she strove as far as possible to keep her mind easy, and the moment after the carriage drove through the gates and stopped at the door of the house. We will not pause to analyse poor Louisa's feelings nor to tell how they varied at every step which that pretty little foot set upon the stairs. In spite of all good Doctor Western's exhortations — in spite of all her own excellent resolutions — Fancy, that incorrigible jade, had been playing all manner of unpleasant tricks with her poor heart, till she had set it fluttering like a new-caught bird, and the tormentor went on till at the drawing-room door Louisa had nearly dropped fainting on the carpet. By a strong effort of the mind, however, she contrived to regain some command over herself, and opening the door, went in. There sat Mrs. Charlton at a table quietly writing a note, with an air of the most complete composure possible — very pretty, very well dressed, and very placid, she was the complete antithesis to all poor Louisa's feelings; and it must be confessed that, though our sweet friend was the least splenetic person in the world, she felt almost provoked, as well as a little ashamed, at the contrast between her own agitation and her step-mother's profound tranquillity.

Intense selfishness is a very excellent thing — in some respects — for those who possess it; for although they may be very sensitive upon the one central spot, yet, at every other point, where all the rest of the world are vulnerable, they are guarded with triple steel. I wonder when Lord Bacon wrote his essay upon the wisdom of the ancients, he did not show that the character of Achilles was a mere allegory of the blind Greek to represent a perfectly selfish man; for there cannot be the slightest doubt that

such was the case. Take his whole history and it is evident; first, he was dipped in Styx, that hellish stream which rendered him invulnerable to all the stings and arrows of the general enemy. There was but one point in which he could be wounded, and that was the lowest point of his whole frame, his right heel. What could this mean but that he could not be reached through the head or the heart? This gave him very great advantages over all his companions, and he was able to overcome, and even kill, a great many much better men than himself; but still it did not secure him happiness, nor obtain for him ultimate success. What a fine moral to the allegory! — and at length a Phrygian boy, in a night cap, found out the weak point, and despatched him with a missile!

However, Mrs. Charlton was a perfect Achilles in her way; she was quite invulnerable upon all points that did not affect herself; and, although it would not have suited her purposes at all, at this time, to have had Mr. Morton killed outright, yet a little bodily suffering and even danger which might render him more interesting in Louisa's eyes, was far from giving her the slightest concern. She would have gone on writing her note, with the fortitude of a martyr, if Mr. Nethersole had been actually trepanning the skull of her guest in the next room provided she had been quite sure he would not die under the operation, and spoil all the schemes she fancied she had brought nearly to perfection. It was her part, however, on the present occasion to affect a considerable degree of benevolent interest in Mr. Morton's situation; and as soon as she beheld Louisa, with Dr. Western following somewhat more slowly into the room, she laid down the pen with a look of concern, saying, "I did not like to shock you, my love, with the news; but our poor friend, Mr. Morton, has met with a sad accident; but do not agitate yourself, my dear child, he is doing quite well. Oh! kind Doctor Western, I am glad you have come; Morton will be delighted to see you. Pray go up to him — he is in his dressing-room, and while you are gone I will tell Louisa all about it, for I know she esteems him as much as any of us."

Doctor Western thought more than he chose to say; but, follow-

ing Mrs. Charlton's suggestion, he went up to his young friend; while the worthy mistress of the house proceeded to relate to her step-daughter all the particulars of her lover having been supported back to the house by a man named Williams, wounded and bleeding; dwelling with somewhat cruel minuteness upon details which she could not but feel would inflict bitter anguish upon her auditor.

Hearing voices speaking within, Dr. Western knocked at the dressing-room door before he entered, and on going in found Morton seated in an arm chair in his dressing-gown, with Mr. Nethersole, the surgeon, beside him. The young gentleman's face was pale and his head had a bandage round it, but he received the worthy clergyman with a smile, saying, "Hard blows seem somewhat rife in your neighbourhood, my dear doctor, but this will prove of no consequence, I am sure, and I hope that Miss Charlton has not been alarmed."

"A good deal," replied Dr. Western, who thought fit to speak guardedly in the presence of the surgeon, although he was very sure that Mr. Nethersole, in common with the whole village of Mallington, had already arranged the marriage of Mr. Morton, and Louisa. "I dare say, however," he continued, "that the report of our good friend here will remove her apprehension, if he can, as I trust, conscientiously tell her there is no danger."

"I see none," replied Mr. Nethersole, rising at the doctor's hint, and moving towards the door, "and I trust in Mr. Morton to find a more tractable patient than Mr. Latimer has proved."

"Stay a moment, Mr. Nethersole," said Morton, "I think that your knowledge of the country, and of what is taking place amongst the people round, may give Dr. Western and myself some insight into the matter which took me up to the common where I received this blow."

"I cannot have you enter into any business to-night, Sir," replied Mr. Nethersole, struggling between a certain degree of curiosity and a sense of professional duty. "Perhaps, Dr. Western can explain the affair to me, and I dare say you will be able to express it fully to-morrow."

Morton whispered a few words to Dr. Western, who exclaimed,

"Yes, yes, he will be able to tell us more than any one. So he was out? — Then it is clearly as we thought," and turning to the surgeon, he informed him of all that had taken place in regard to poor Lucy Edmonds, and inquired whether anything had come to his knowledge which might direct them in their search for her. So well, however, had Williams laid his plans, that even to the ears of Mr. Nethersole, which were habitually regaled by all the gossip of the place, not a hint had arrived which could give them any insight into the events of that night; but, relying upon all the various petty sources of information which were at his command, the worthy surgeon promised boldly to bring them tidings of the whole affair by the next morning; adding at the same time, that if he received any intelligence previously, which might serve as a clue to the place where Lucy had been taken, he would immediately communicate it to the constable. He then added a warning that quiet and forbearance from all exciting subjects of conversation were absolutely necessary for Mr. Morton, and descended to the drawing-room to make his report to Mrs. Charlton and Louisa.

The conversation between Morton and Dr. Western, after the surgeon had left them, took a sort of zig-zag course between the two principal events of the night, sometimes turning to Mallington Park, sometimes resting upon Mallington Common. Into the assault which had been committed upon the person of his young friend Dr. Western inquired as a magistrate, hinting plainly that he strongly suspected that the act had been perpetrated by Williams himself, who was notoriously a bad character, and who had by no means cleared himself to the doctor's full satisfaction from the charge of having knocked down and plundered worthy Mr. Gibbs.

Morton, however, rejected the idea at once, exclaiming, "Oh, no, my dear, Sir, that is quite out of the question. For several minutes I remained quite stunned and senseless; and when I recovered my recollection, I found this very man bathing my head with water, which he had brought up in his leathern hat. He told me he had found me there as he was walking home, and had seen a man go away from the spot as he came up. Now, I saw the man, too, who did it — at least I can have no doubt of the fact — and he

was much taller than this Williams, though not so stout and broadly built."

Dr. Western shook his head, still unconvinced, and proceeded to inquire into all the particulars, asking, amongst other questions, whether in this case as in that of Mr. Gibbs the act of violence had been accompanied by robbery.

"I suppose so," replied Morton; "but I really have not had time to ascertain the fact, what with bleeding, bandaging, and one treatment or another. The sum I had upon me, however, was very small, and, by looking in my pockets, the fact will soon be ascertained."

He rose as he spoke to examine as he proposed, but sat down again immediately, feeling himself giddy; and Dr. Western brought him his coat and waistcoat, which had been cast down upon a chair. His watch had not been taken, but his purse was gone; and though he merely laughed at the trifling loss of money that he had sustained, yet, when he came to put his hand into the pocket of his coat, his brow contracted, and a look of anxiety came into his eyes. "My pocket-book is gone," he said, looking at Dr. Western, "and with it the papers I took, thinking they might be necessary in the inquiry we were making this evening."

"That is unfortunate, indeed!" exclaimed the clergyman, "but they were copies were they not?"

"In some cases the originals," replied Morton. "They must be recovered by some means, or we shall have interminable law suits."

"They can be of no use to any one else," said Dr. Western; "so that, doubtless, if we offer a reward they will be restored."

"We must couple that offer," answered Morton, "with an engagement to ask no questions. Perhaps, it might be as well to have an officer down from London. They are as much accustomed to negotiate with thieves as to apprehend them."

Knowing the great importance of the papers which had been taken, and feeling what must be the effect of the loss upon his young friend's mind, Dr. Western did his best to persuade him that they would by easily regained; and having succeeded in some degree, and also laid out the plan of operations to be pursued for

their recovery, the worthy clergyman left Morton to repose, and proceeded to say a word or two of comfort to Louisa before he returned to the rectory.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THERE be dark and fearful things in life, over which it is well to throw a veil deep and shadowy as themselves. Acts of blood and violence, indeed — the coarser and more deformed passions having little attractive in their aspect, and few links of association with the mind of man, except in its more brutal and depraved state — seldom lead to imitate or induce to follow, any but those who are already plunged too deep in crime ever to extricate themselves from the abyss. But there be vices and acts, to which the descent, however wide, is so easy, from passions legitimate (and ennobling even) when restrained to proper limits, that many may be tempted to run down the declivity to gather the poisonous flowers at its foot, if their gaudy colours be flaunted to the eye, or their baleful odours brought too near the sense.

We left Alfred Latimer alone in the cottage with Lucy Edmonds, not quite an hour after sunset. It was near midnight when the door closed behind him, and he took his way, with a hurried and irregular step, over the moor. He watched not the clouds rushing across the sky; he marked not the light of the declining moon while it played as if in living sport — over bush and tree, and green grass and yellow road, and deep pit and glistening pool — with the shadows that swept by; but with his eyes fixed upon the ground, and his hand thrust into his bosom, on he went, without pause, till he came within sight of the cottage where he had been carried after the accident which had befallen the chaise. There for an instant he stopped, put his hand to his head, and thought. As he did so, he looked towards the low building and saw the door partly opened, so that the light streamed out for a moment, and then closed again quickly, as if some one were watching — perhaps for his coming. He went on again quickly, and entered.

There was but one person in the little room; and that was the man Williams, who was seated gloomily at the table, with a candle beside him, smoking a short pipe.

"Ah! you 've come back at last," he said abruptly; "this is all very wrong, Mr. Latimer — I know what you will say; but it 's all nonsense. If she 's to stay there the night alone, it is no matter whether it be an hour or two longer or not. However, here are other things to think of. The matter 's blown all over the place; and there have been people up here seeking you, so it 's fixed upon you. They have been up at my house, too, but I was not fool enough to be out of the way; and Soames, the constable, and half a dozen others, have been beating about for you as if you were a cock pheasant under a hollybush."

"Who came up here?" demanded Alfred Latimer, not a little alarmed and annoyed at what he heard. "What the devil has the constable to do with it? Who can stop me from taking the girl if she is willing to go with me?"

"The magistrates say they can," answered Williams, "and they have issued a warrant against you, but Soames is in no great hurry in executing it; for he is not particularly fond of Master Edmonds, and chuckled over his daughter having gone off, as if it were fine fun. So you 've got till to-morrow morning to get poor Lucy away into another county till you can be married, and that matter set all right."

Alfred Latimer made no reply, but looked down upon the table and twisted some white ashes which had fallen from his companion's pipe into a heap between his finger and thumb.

"As to who was seeking you up here," continued Williams, after a moment's pause, "it was the gentleman who is staying at your mother's; and that old idiot, Mother Brown, was fool enough to tell him you were out. Then her son, a greater fool still, chose to make the matter worse by knocking him down on the common with a great stone as big as your head. I found him stunned and bleeding, and took him home very queer, so there will be a fine work about it you may be sure, and I 'd advise you to get out of the county for a time as soon as you can."

"I will — I will," answered Alfred Latimer, who saw all

the difficulties that these complications were likely to plunge him into. "I can't go to-night, for Lucy must have some rest, and I must get a chaise or something to take us."

"That is soon got," replied Williams, "but you can stop till day-break and then be off. Turn in for a few hours and take some sleep; and about four I'll walk over to Long Sutton and bring a chaise for you while you go and tell poor Lucy Edmonds to get ready."

"But are you sure to wake by that time?" asked Alfred Latimer. "I know if my head is once laid down I shall not open an eye for many an hour."

"You have never been at sea," answered Williams; "if you show a bold heart, and carry out what we were talking of, you'll soon be like me. I never sleep above four hours at a time and seldom that. I could not for my life, Mr. Latimer, go on a minute beyond the hour of my watch; so do not be afraid, I'll wake you."

After a few words more, Alfred Latimer retired to the inner chamber and lay down in his clothes, but his expectations of sleeping soundly were not verified. Whether it was fatigue, or agitation, or the consciousness of guilt that kept him waking matters little; but he tossed from side to side for well nigh an hour without closing an eye, and during that time his thoughts turned more than once to the words which Williams had spoken —"if you show a bold heart and carry out what we were talking of" — and the wild and dangerous schemes which the other had instilled into his mind presented themselves to his imagination decked out in all the splendid colours of excitement and adventure. Yes, he thought, he would carry out what had been proposed; he would quit his native land, and on some fair foreign shore live a free and unrestrained life of pleasure and of enterprise. Why should he stay where he was? His noble race disowned him for no fault of his; his mother grudged him the pitiful supply necessary to the enjoyment of life; his little patrimony was already deeply dipped in debt. There were no prospects, no hopes before him — he never thought of honest industry and energetic exertion — and he would go afar, taking

Lucy with him, to share his bold free life. Then came the question of, should he marry her? He had not yet got the length of answering boldly, No; but he resolved to think about it further; and that was quite enough to prove that the scoundrel was in full possession of his heart. When a man once asks himself if he shall keep a promise, he may tremble for his honour; but if he takes time to consider, he may write himself down a villain from that hour.

Sleep at length came, and when it did it was profound. He fancied that he had not closed his eyes more than a minute when Williams shook him by the shoulder, and told him to rise, for it was four o'clock. It was as dark as the grave — the moon had gone down, the sky was cloudy, and not the least glimmering of dawn was yet to be discerned. It is wonderful how external things give a colour to the feelings of the heart. Alfred Latimer felt the bold wild schemes which he had been indulging, chilled and dimmed by the gloomy aspect of all around him; but after a few moments' conversation with Williams, he set off for the cottage where he had left Lucy, while his companion walked away in the direction of a neighbouring village in which was an inn that let post-horses.

Slowly and thoughtfully — if that can be called thought which was but a confused and rambling concatenation of fancies, memories, and purposes — Alfred Latimer walked on in the darkness, internally cursing his own folly in not having returned, at once to Mother Brown's cottage as soon as Lucy had been carried away, and pouring out still more bitter imprecations upon the man Brown for his attack upon Morton; though he did not fail, at the same time, with the rage that all vicious men feel towards any one who endeavours to thwart or expose them, to comment upon what he termed Mr. Morton's impertinence, in endeavouring to ascertain where he had passed the night. "What business is it of his?" he asked himself, "a poor, pitiful devil — what right has he to meddle with my affairs? If he interferes any more, I will make him repent it."

Nor must it be supposed for one moment that Mr. Latimer's indignation at Tom Brown originated in any feeling for Morton,

or that he felt grieved that a gentleman from whom he had received more than one proof of kindness had been injured. Not in the least. That was not a part of the young gentleman's character: his selfishness was not less than his fair mother's, though it assumed a different form. Morton might have had his brains knocked out, without calling for any other observation from Alfred Latimer than "Poor devil!" or something tantamount. But Brown's violence he saw might lead to a good deal of noise and investigation. His conduct, his companions, his schemes, might all be exposed, and some of his purposes thwarted; and, therefore — but from that cause alone — he would willingly have inflicted upon Brown even a more severe chastisement than his offence merited.

As he walked on, the darkness somewhat diminished: not that even the faint streaks of coming day could be at first seen in the east, but there was a sort of grey light began to steal through the blackness of night; and when he reached the bank which sheltered the cottage, he could see a golden gleam coming on some of the clouds at the horizon's edge. He paused and looked at it as it extended, like the first glimmering of heavenly light upon a long darkened mind. He looked up at the cottage, too, as the dawn began to display its closed shutters and rustic porch, covered with climbing plants. It all looked peaceful and calm. There is no heart without some softer point, where some effect may not be produced for good; and as he stood and gazed while the light spread rosy over head, he thought of her within, and her young gentleness, with feelings of tenderness — almost of compassion. Some sensations of compunction came over him, and he murmured, "Well, I will marry her as I promised."

Then he gazed at the cottage again, and paused a while before he knocked, saying, "I dare say she is asleep!"

He little knew Lucy Edmonds, to think that she could sleep.

At length he walked up to the porch, and knocked with his hand, having told her to lock the door, when he left her the night before. But there was no answer, and turning the handle to shake it, so as to rouse her, he found the door open, and went in. Lucy was kneeling beside her bed, exactly in the same guise

as the night before, with her head and arms resting on the bed clothes, and her face buried in them. The heaving of her frame showed that she was still weeping; and Alfred Latimer raised her up, and strove to comfort her. The first words he spoke were the best that he could have chosen for that purpose, though they were simply suggested by the circumstances of the moment. "Come, Lucy, come!" he said, "do not go on crying; but prepare to come away with me immediately, for the people have found out all, and we must be off into another county directly, or they will take you away, and stop our marriage. Once we are married, you know, they have no power over you."

"Oh, that we were!" cried Lucy Edmonds, drying her tears; "but how can we go?"

"I have sent for a chaise, dear girl," replied her lover. "Hark! I think I hear it coming. Get ready — there 's a love."

"I will be ready in a moment," answered Lucy; "I will but wash my eyes."

"I will go out, and see if that be it," said Alfred Latimer; and walking into the road he took a step or two up the little declivity, where, as soon as his head was above the slope, he saw the chaise coming down at great speed, with some one inside.

"Williams has come with it," said the young gentleman. "I am glad of that, for I must tell him to look out, and let me know what is going on;" and thus thinking, he turned back, and entered the little passage of the house.

The chaise drove up at the same time, but the voice of Williams saying to some one, "Well, Sir, we don't go any farther. Now, you must walk straight on; and then, the first turning on the left brings you to Mallington," caused Alfred Latimer to look round, when to his surprise he beheld the face of Captain Tankerville.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE sight of Captain Tankerville's face was, at that particular moment and place, by no means agreeable to Alfred Latimer. He remembered instantaneously a promise which he had made and not fulfilled, regarding a certain sum of fifty pounds which it was not very pleasant for him to part with; and he would willingly have retreated into the house, but he was not quick enough to escape the shrewd eyes of his former fellow prisoner, who at once replied to the directions given to him by Jack Williams, saying "I have no need to go to Mallington, for the person I came to seek I see is here."

There was a sort of sneering bitterness in his tone which irritated the already excited feelings of Alfred Latimer; and, giving up the plan which the first impulse led him to pursue, he advanced at once, saying, in a cold tone, "I presume you mean me, Captain Tankerville; but I am too busy at present to hold much conversation with you."

"Our conversation need be very short, Mr. Latimer," replied Tankerville, walking up to him; "I come to ask if you remember having promised me a loan of fifty pounds, which you went away without having performed; and if you are ready and willing to perform it now?"

"And what if I say no?" asked Alfred Latimer, put upon his metal by the presence of Williams, as well as by the tone which the other assumed. "I am not a man to be bullied, Captain Tankerville; so I again ask, what if I say no?"

"Why, then all I can say for you is that you are a pitiful scoundrel, and that you are scarcely worth the horsewhipping which I shall give you."

"Hush, hush!" cried Williams; "if the matter's to take such a course as that, we had better move further off upon the common. It doesn't do to talk of such things with a lady near."

Alfred Latimer nodded his head, and pointed to Tankerville to go on up the path, which after a moment's consideration he did. The young gentleman followed, with a look towards the

house, and Jack Williams strode on by his side, saying, in a whisper, "You should keep your promise, at all events, Mr. Latimer."

"I would if he had spoken civilly," replied the other, "but I won't be bullied by him or any man."

"That 's all right, that 's all right," replied Williams, "but yet you should find some way of keeping your promise, too."

Alfred Latimer did not answer for a moment or two; but then he put his hand in his pocket and drew out his pocket-book, saying "I 'll tell you what I 'll do, Williams; I 'll give you the fifty pounds, and then you can let him have it, whatever comes of it, for hang me, if he talks in this way, if I don't have a shot at him."

"That 's the way you gentlemen settle these things," replied Williams, with a grim smile, "and perhaps it 's as good a way as any other. But here we are out of sight of the cattage, and so you can have it out with him; I 'll see to this," he continued, taking three notes, which the young gentleman handed to him, "and now you can talk to him with a cool face."

By this time Captain Tankerville had halted at about fifty paces before them, and the other two joined him without delay, Alfred Latimer, walking up to him with that firm and decided sort of air which is not without its effect upon bullies of all kinds.

"You talked of horsewhipping me, Captain Tankerville," he said; "that is all nonsense, for, in the first place, you have not got a horsewhip with you; and in the next, that is a game that two can play at; but if you think I have done you any wrong, I am quite ready to settle the affair with you, as gentlemen usually do."

"When and where?" asked the Captain, with a sneer upon his lip. "You are what our good bailiffs used to call a slippery customer."

"Here, this minute," replied Latimer, stung to the quick; "here, I say."

"Ah! that 's only because you think I have not the means of taking you at your word; but I 'll show you that you are mistaken," was Tankerville's reply; and, putting his hands into his pockets, he drew forth his duelling pistols, and laid them down upon the turf, together with a powder flask and some balls. "You thought

to get rid of me in that way, did you? — You know well enough I never miss my mark."

"I 've heard you say so," replied the young gentleman, glaring upon him with eyes in which there was much anger indeed, but no terror, for he was now roused to a pitch of daring which even the thought of death could not cool; and as he spoke he drew forth his pocket handkerchief, and twisted it round like a rope. "There 's one way, Captain Tankerville," he continued, "of making all shots equal, and ensuring fair play. So, you load one of the pistols, and I will load the other; after which you shall take one end of this handkerchief and I the other; for if you kill me, I 'll be hanged if you shall kill any one else. Jack Williams here shall give the word; and if either of us fires before the time, he will both bear witness and secure him."

"That 's the right sort, Sir," cried Williams, with a laugh. But Captain Tankerville did not seem to relish the proposal; and crossing his arms upon his breast, without any motion to take up either of the pistols he had laid down, he stood gazing, with a frowning brow, at his opponent, as if considering what he should reply.

"I did not come here to commit murder," he said at length, "or to be murdered."

"What!" cried Williams. "A man who never misses his mark does not come down to commit murder! Pooh, nonsense! Will you fight him over the handkerchief or not?"

"What 's that to you?" exclaimed Tankerville. "No, I will not; but still I say he 's played me a very shabby trick."

"You shan't say that any longer," replied Williams, doubling up the notes and holding them out towards him.

"There 's the money, it is not for that he stands, but of course he would not be brow-beat by a bully, and you are no better, and mayhap a bit of a coward too. There, there 's no use of saying any more. We have had your answer, and can't wait palavering; but remember, if you don't pay him within two months I 'll find you out, and break every bone in your skin, if he doesn't."

There is a great difference, especially with a good marksman not very scrupulous as to taking little advantages, between a long

shot at from eight to twelve paces, with an inexperienced opponent, and the very unpleasant alternative of the two ends of a pocket handkerchief. Captain Tankerville felt it fully, and did not at all approve of the latter. Now, he was not by any means, as Jack Williams suspected, a coward; but there are few men who would not a great deal rather avoid certain death, even with the consolation of taking an enemy out of the world along with them. Captain Tankerville, however, did not in any degree look upon Alfred Latimer as an enemy; nor did he at all want his life: he only wanted his money; and when that was offered him, although he did not at all like the tone which Latimer himself used, nor that which Williams thought fit to employ, yet he did not consider it worth while to lose a certain number of years, which he calculated upon passing pleasantly, in order to do away the disagreeable impression their scorn produced. He was a man of very nice calculations, and, having summed up all the pros and cons in his head, he took the money proffered; but in order to get rid as far as possible of the appearance of sneaking, as school-boys would call it, he exclaimed "Why the devil, Latimer, did you not let me have the money at first? I am sure I always wished to behave very friendly towards you; and if you had but said a civil word we should have had no quarrel at all."

Alfred Latimer turned upon his heel, saying, with a somewhat contemptuous look, "You came down here to bully, but you mistook your man; and you will now recollect that what I will do because I have promised it, or when I am asked civilly, I won't do for big words or angry looks;" and without waiting for any further reply, he walked away with Jack Williams, leaving Tankerville to pick up the pistols and powder-flask, and stomach the disagreeable points of his situation as best he might.

He remained gazing after them for a minute or two with an angry face; and then, with a toss of the head, placed the implements of destruction in his pocket, muttering "Well, perhaps I may pay you all I owe you some of these days."

With this satisfactory anticipation, which gives comfort to many a disappointed blackguard in this world, Captain Tankerville walked slowly over the moor, but he had also a still more sub-

stantial source of consolation for any mortification he might have suffered in the sum of fifty pounds which his pocket contained, and out of which he proposed to obtain some thirty or forty pleasant days; for it never in the slightest degree entered into his mind to apply even a part of it to the satisfaction of those creditors with whom he had just been enabled to enter into an arrangement, as it is termed, by their discovering — somewhat too late, indeed — that, though they might keep him in prison to all eternity, they would never be a bit nearer the receipt of their money. He had promised them very magnificently, that if they withdrew the detainers against him, and he could get a ship, he would make over to them two-thirds of his pay; and they had swallowed, or seemed to swallow, the bait, and, rather than plunge into any further law expenses against him, had agreed to his proposal.

While this scoundrel, one of the many whom we have had occasion to introduce into this work — and we beg the reader to remark that they were all very different scoundrels one from the other: Alfred Latimer, Jack Williams, Bill Maltby, and the others, all being distinct varieties of that wide extended genus — was thus pondering and walking on, his two late companions proceeded towards the cottage, Alfred Latimer having risen immensely in the estimation of Mr. Williams by the events which had just taken place. Williams, indeed, said to himself, "I thought he would come out so if he had a chance;" but Alfred Latimer had risen in his own estimation, too, though not in the best possible way. He had neither thought nor known that his resolution and vigour would go so far. He had dreamt wild dreams, indeed, of bold and daring actions; but they had all wanted confirmation, and now they had it. He had been tried; his courage had been found equal to the occasion; and he had taken his place as one who would shrink from nothing that passion or necessity required. Instead, however, of the firmness in right and virtue which such a consciousness might have bestowed, it gave him nothing but an impetus in the course of evil which he was already following. There are two paths before every man, the right and the wrong one; and every fresh power of mind or body that he acquires or discovers but hurries him on, at every step, farther and farther

from the one he has not chosen. Well for those who make their first choice wisely.

While, with a firm and confident step, however, he was walking on towards the cottage, with some portion of the excitement under which he had lately acted still colouring his cheek and flashing in his eye, Jack Williams, of all men in the world, thought fit to read him a lesson in his own peculiar code of morality. "That was excellently done, Mr. Latimer," he said; "no one could have done it better; but you would not have been able to do it half as well, unless you had made up your mind to keep your promise to the vagabond. With that off your mind, you ran alongside of him like a schooner with the black jack flying, and he was glad enough to sheer off; but if you had known that you intended to break your word, you would have crept up like a dirty lugger that takes half an hour to reef her sails. Always keep a promise, for a man can stand anything with his heart free."

"Ay, I always intended to keep it," answered Alfred Latimer; "but it had slipped my memory."

"Never let that slip," replied Jack Williams; "always look sharp after word given. The devil might have been a sailor if he had but looked aloft — but it was all very well done together; first, you kept your word — which is right to man or woman — and that without being bullied into it, and then you showed the bully in his true colours."

By this time they were at the door of the cottage, and there Alfred Latimer paused for an instant in thought, which did not seem the most pleasant, notwithstanding all the commendations he had received; but there was one part of those very commendations not the most agreeable to him; for when he had said that he always intended to keep his promise to Captain Tankerville he had spoken an untruth. The fifty pounds was too great a diminution of his small store to be parted with willingly; and he did not feel at all obliged to his companion for having handed over his money to his adversary so readily. Men, however, are in general — I might, indeed, say always — willing to assume the qualities imputed to them. It is one of the minor forms of that want of mental courage by which we are continually led to actions that we

never contemplated; and, unwilling to show Williams that he was at heart different from that which the other thought fit to suppose him, Alfred Latimer mused over what was to be done to supply the deficiency in his purse, but made no comment aloud.

When he entered the little parlour he found Lucy seated at the table ready to set out, but with her eyes full of apprehension, for she had heard angry words without. She asked some questions of her lover in a low tone, to which he answered briefly, almost sharply, that he would tell her as they went, for they had no time to stay; and taking her by the hand he led her to the chaise, spoke a few words to Williams in regard to their future proceedings, and then directed the post-boy where to drive.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A WEEK passed over at Mallington in events which may require some mention, but no very long detail. Gossip and scandal, tittle-tattle and surmise, had ample room to disport themselves in the affair of Lucy Edmonds and Alfred Latimer; nor where the marvel-mongers less satisfied with the pleasant little occurrences of Mr. Morton having been knocked down so shortly after the knocking down of Mr. Gibbs. It was all very delightful, in fact; and if one could have looked into the hearts of half the people in half the houses in Mallington, it would have been found that as much comfort and amusement was derived from these two disasters as from a grand festival or a race ball. It might, perhaps, have enhanced the delight of many persons in the place if Mr. Morton had condescended to be dangerously ill for a month afterwards, or to die of a brain fever, brought on by the blow he had received; but he was obstinate, and would do nothing of the kind. On the contrary, though Mr. Nethersole insisted upon his remaining in the house for three days, yet Morton, who felt himself quite well, submitted with reluctance; on the fourth day went out with Mrs. Charlton and Louisa in the carriage; and on the fifth was walking about as usual.

Nothing could be kinder than Mrs. Charlton was during the whole period of his convalescence; nothing could be more tender

or considerate for all his feelings. The house was kept as quiet as possible; no parties took place; she assigned him as his own particular abode the small back drawing-room, which looked down the hill; she was with him for several hours every day; and, when she was not, she invariably sent Louisa to amuse him and keep him from being dull. She was in fact, wonderfully considerate, both as a step-mother and as a friend.

It must be confessed that Morton and Louisa availed themselves of her kindness to the utmost, and that they were very very happy together, though Mrs. Charlton's conduct somewhat puzzled them both. However, they did not give themselves much concern about it; but, remembering the old adage of *carpe diem*, they made the most of the present moment; and every hour saw their love increasing and their confidence in each other and in their future happiness augmenting.

It is a pleasure and a relief to the mind to quit the society of scamps, swindlers, and blackguards, and to come back to the amiable and the good; nor are we slightly tempted to remain with Louisa and her lover, to dwell upon their conversations, to relate their words and thoughts, and to speak of all that passed between them, even at the risk of being accused of insipidity, but that other events greatly affecting them in the end, call for notice at our hands. Before proceeding to touch upon those events, however, it may be needful to tell how Mrs. Charlton bore the absence of her respectable son; and the strong suspicions which she, as well as everybody else was forced to entertain regarding his abduction of Lucy Edmonds. She was a woman of great fortitude, and on no occasion of her life did she display that virtue more conspicuously than at present. When the news was brought to her that Alfred had left the cottage, and that there was every reason to believe he had taken Lucy Edmonds with him, her cheek did flush a little, her eye did flash; and it is not improbable that if her son had been at hand she would have given him a box on the ear; but she very soon recovered her serenity, and took rather a dolorous and lamentable tone with good Dr. Western (who broke the intelligence to her as tenderly as possible), grieved over the depravity of the world, moralised upon the sor-

rows which children bring upon parents, and shed a tear or two over the incorrigible vice of her own offspring. Nevertheless, with the truest philosophy, she soon became reconciled to that which she could not change, said a few discouraging words in regard to the pursuit of her fugitive son and heir, and before night, seemed to have forgotten the burden of her sorrows, so cheerfully did she bear them.

To Morton, indeed, she spoke a few words in regard to Latimer's conduct, expressing great regret that he behaved so unworthily; but declared that she thought it would be unwise to seek for him, and force Lucy away, as it was very evident from what Dr. Western said that Edmonds would never receive his daughter again, and, her character of course being ruined, she would have no resource but a course even more vicious than that which she was already pursuing.

In this very philosophical view of the question Morton did not altogether agree; but he reserved what he had to say upon the subject for worthy Dr. Western, whose opinions he knew were likely to agree more with his own. In the meantime, however, two events occurred affecting himself which must be noticed, as neither the one nor the other were altogether without their effect, insignificant as one of them might seem.

A large packet arrived at the inn from London bearing his address; and being sent to the house it remained for some time upon the drawing-room table, under the eyes of Mrs. Charlton. She gazed at it with much curiosity; she would have given a great deal to have seen the contents. Who knows how far the irritating passion would have carried her, if it had not been for all the obstacles that lay in the way. But the packet was guarded with double and triple folds of thick brown paper, equal in the eye of law and decency to triple gates of steel. There was, moreover, the strong string which boys call lay cord, and every knot was sealed. Brown paper, string, and seals are dangerous things to meddle with. Unlike the worthy independent electors of towns and boroughs in our purest of all pure representative systems, they almost uniformly bear witness of the fact whenever they are

tampered with; and Mrs. Charlton, knowing the danger of such a proceeding, judiciously refrained.

Virtue had its reward, for no sooner did Mr. Morton enter the room than, as if he could divine what had been passing in her mind and wished to gratify laudable curiosity, he took out a pen-knife, begged Mrs. Charlton's pardon for investigating the contents of the packet, and cut the string in a most wasteful and extravagant manner, displaying to her eyes as he unfolded the covers what seemed nearly a ream of large-sized drawing-paper, a vast number of Brookman and Langdon's black lead pencils, and sundry small cakes of water colours. It seemed, in short, as if he had made up his mind to teach all Mallington to draw; but, strange to say, nothing could be more satisfactory to Mrs. Charlton than the sight — not that she had the slightest intention of taking lessons herself, but simply because it confirmed her belief that Mr. Morton was exactly the sort of gentleman she wanted.

The other incident to which we have alluded was the arrival of a visitor to Mr. Morton from the great city of London. Exactly two days after his misadventure on the common, and about half an hour after the arrival of the coach at Mallington, some one rang at the bell of Mallington House. It will be recollected that at this time Morton had not yet been out since the accident, and he was in the little drawing-room we have mentioned, sitting with Mrs. Charlton and Louisa, when one of the servants announced that somebody wanted to see him.

Morton naturally inquired what sort of a person it was, and the man replied, "A queer-looking sort of gentleman, Sir, with knee breeches and white stockings."

"Pray, let him come up," said Morton; "or, perhaps, not to disturb you, Mrs. Charlton, it will be better to send him to my dressing-room."

But the lady would not hear of such a thing, saying that she and Louisa would go into the other drawing-room, that Mr. Morton might speak with the visitor.

That visitor, however, had to pass through the chamber to which she betook herself before he reached the one in which Mr.

Morton remained, and consequently the lady of the mansion had a full opportunity of seeing his somewhat remarkable person. He was a man of five-feet ten or eleven in height; and yet, strange to say, he looked short, for his breadth was out of proportion to his length. What was the girth of his shoulders we cannot take upon ourselves to say, and his chest seemed to have been modelled by nature from the form of a bull. His thighs, legs, and arms, were all strong and muscular, and the calves of his legs, though the ankles were fine and small, looked perfectly colossal in the white cotton stockings. As if he fancied that the eye of the beholder could not take him all in at once with sufficient accuracy, he had divided the superficies of his person into separate compartments, as the geographers mark out the different countries on a map by distinct colours. His back, shoulders, and arms were clothed in dark blue, his chest and stomach a little below the waist were bright yellow, his abdomen and thighs, including the knees, were drab, and the legs down to the shoes, as we have before said, were white. His head, too was a remarkable head; the forehead by no means an unintellectual one, with the observing faculties very strongly developed, and combativeness, destructiveness, secretiveness, as the phrenologists call certain bumps at the back and sides of the head, together with the organs attributed to many another animal impulse, were wonderfully large and protuberant. The head altogether, however, was not very large, but it had a square stern character about it, and the face, though the features were not bad, had a look of shrewd daring cunning as its habitual expression.

The instant he followed the servant into the room — though the man said "this way, Sir," and walked on towards the opposite door — Mr. Morton's visitor stopped for an instant, bowed to the two ladies, and then, in a moment, his eyes wandered over everything that the chamber contained. The glance was as rapid as light, but yet you could not help feeling that it marked everything with an accuracy very peculiar. One saw that it was not a general sweep, but that it went round by pulses, as it were, stopping at every thing for the millionth part of a second, and then on again, from table to chair, from chair to china vase, from

china vase to fire-screen, from fire-screen to picture, from picture to piano, from piano to music-stand, from music-stand to windows, from windows to curtains, from curtains to doors, and so on to the very handles and key holes of the locks. It was a glance quite equal to Lord Burleigh's shake of the head, and as soon over, for on he walked immediately, and followed the servant to Mr. Morton's presence.

"What a strange looking creature," said Mrs. Charlton, to her step-daughter, as soon as the man had passed through the room. "I hope he is not one of Morton's friends; for though you know I care little about rank, yet good manners must be joined with acquaintances and connexions at least respectable."

Louisa only smiled, perfectly certain that whatever the man might want with her lover, or her lover with him, there was nothing deserving the name of friendship between them.

So, indeed, it proved, for on the visitor's entrance Mr. Morton gazed at him as a stranger, and he, on his part, began the conversation by inquiring, in very good language, whether he had the honour of addressing Mr. Morton. The young gentleman replied in the affirmative; and the other immediately went on to say, "Well, Sir, my name is Prior; and I was sent down by Sir Richard to speak with you concerning your pocket-book, according to your desire."

"Oh, from Bow-street?" exclaimed Morton, "I did not expect you so soon. Pray take a seat, and I will explain the whole matter to you."

Prior, the officer, according to this invitation, seated himself on one of the drawing-room chairs, holding his hat over his knees, and his body a little bent forward, and in that attitude received from Mr. Morton a clear and distinct, though succinct, account of the attack made upon him on the common, and the loss of his pocket-book. He uttered not a word while the particulars were related; he asked not a question, but, like a sklilful physician, suffered the patient to state his own case before he commenced his interrogatory. In the present instance, indeed, the mind of the narrator was of that peculiar cast which brings easily and, as it were, naturally into one focus all the principal points

of any question it has to deal with, and, therefore, at the end of the tale the officer had very few inquiries to make.

"He was a taller man, I think you say, Sir," was his first question, "than the man who brought you home?"

"Decidedly," replied Morton; "if the person who struck me with the stone was the same that I saw by the edge of the pit."

"Can you give a guess how long you might lie there?" asked Prior.

"It could not have been many minutes," answered the young gentleman, "for as I reached the top of the hill in going, I heard Mallington clock strike nine; the distance from that spot to the cottage is about a mile, and when I came into the hall of this house with Williams, the hall clock was marking twenty minutes to ten."

"He must have been very near then, Sir;" rejoined Prior, "when the blow was given."

"That is true, certainly," replied Morton; "but yet that does not prove that he had anything to do with it, or even saw it done."

"No, Sir; but, as Sir Richard would say, it is a suspicious circumstance in the case of a man of bad character," was Prior's reply; and, after a moment's thought, he went on to say, "Well! there is no telling as yet, but I will go and make inquiries. I know one young fellow down here of the name of Maltby; and though he is not likely to tell anything he knows, yet one sometimes gets a hint by finding out what it is that folks wish to conceal. However, I must have you tell me in the first place, Sir, what it is you want — the man or the pocket-book. I think I shall have no difficulty in nabbing the one or getting back the other; but I doubt that I shall be able to manage both."

"Oh, the pocket-book, by all means, if it can be obtained with all its contents," answered Morton. "Indeed, I have already ordered bills to be struck offering a reward for the recovery, and promising to ask no questions; but the lazy fellow of a printer has not done them yet."

"So much the better, Sir," replied Prior, "don't you think of sticking them up. Leave the matter to me. If you will give

a reward and ask no questions, we 'll soon get the pocket-book back, never fear."

"The reward I proposed to offer was fifty pounds," rejoined Morton; "and I shall be well inclined to bestow on you, Mr. Prior, the same sum if you recover the papers for me."

"Thank you, Sir; quite sufficient," replied the officer; "you may look upon the matter as done, if they have not tindered the stuff — I mean burnt the papers. First we must find out who has got the book, and then we must tame him a little. It may be Williams himself — it may be some other; and now I think of it, as I got off the coach I saw Captain Tankerville walking along with a slickery doll from London."

"With a what?" exclaimed Morton in much surprise.

"Oh! what I call a slickery doll, Sir," replied Prior, laughing; "that means an over-dressed bad woman, and I should not wonder if there was a whole gang of 'em down doing business in different ways — cracksmen, and smashers, and prigs, and all. However, I 'll look to that afterwards; the pocket-book 's the first thing, and I 'll just go and 'stablish myself at the Bagpipes, to see what 's going forward; and, by your leave, I 'll bring you up a report, Sir, perhaps to-night."

"Do, do, Mr. Prior," answered Morton; "I should like to hear the steps you take as you go on. Good evening to you," and he walked after him to the door.

"In the name of fortune, Mr. Morton," exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, as soon as Prior was gone; "who is that odd-looking man?"

"Only a Bow-street officer, my dear Madam," replied Morton; "you know I lost my purse and my pocket-book when I was knocked down on the common; and I thought it expedient to send to London to see what could be done for their recovery."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Charlton, and there the conversation dropped.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE movements of Mr. Morton were very mysterious to the good people of Mallington. They did not watch him. Oh no! — they would not have demeaned themselves to any such pitiful practices in regard to any person, much less towards a poor pitiful painter, though he was taken notice of by the gentlefolks, and held his head so high. But Miss Mathilda Martin could not help observing that though painters might, perhaps, sketch by day, yet she could not see how they could sketch by night. That was, she thought, quite out of the question; and yet Mr. Morton was more than once seen walking up to Mallington Park after sunset. Sometimes, too, he did it very slily, as Miss Mathilda observed; for twice, instead of walking straightforward down through the town, like a man, he went by the back lanes.

Mr. Crump, who was one day in the shop while her observations were going on — for she was one of those who did not at all wish to conceal her opinions of other people — ventured to hint that perhaps Mr. Morton might have wished to call upon Dr. Western in his way, as the doctor was so fond of him. But Miss Mathilda, who had a touch of the spitfire in her disposition, immediately proceeded in the most approved fashion to neutralise Mr. Crump's defence of the young gentleman, by imputing personal motives for the unwonted candour he showed.

"Ah! you say that, Mr. Crump," she replied, "because he 's always buying things at your shop."

"He always pays for them ready money, however," said Mr. Crump.

"Well, we may some day see the end of that," exclaimed Miss Martin, coming to her sister's rescue. "There was that Mrs. Latimer, when first she came she must pay ready money for everything, too; and yet I know that when that old fool Charlton took up with her, and made her his wife, she had not a five-pound note to bless herself with; and now that she is his widow, and got a large jointure, she is in debt to every person in the place, and I fancy in London too, if we knew all."

"I don't see why she should be so taken with Mr. Morton," said Mr. Crump, "if he isn't a man of fortune; for she 's very fond of great people."

"Poo, nonsense!" replied Miss Mathilda. "Birds of a feather flock together, Mr. Crump; and, if all tales be true, her own father was just such another as this Mr. Morton: a dashing impudent artist, or music-master, or something of that kind, giving himself all the airs of a gentleman born, till he hooked in the Honourable Mr. Latimer to marry his daughter; and now this fellow is just playing the same game to marry poor Miss Louisa. I should like to spoil the job for them very much; for I can't a-bear to see a nice, pretty, genteel young woman, of six or seven thousand a-year, throw herself away on such a fellow as that."

"Well, it 's no businss of mine," said Miss Martin, senior; "but I can't help wondering what makes him go down so often to the park. I thought at one time it was after pretty Lucy Edmonds he went; but now that she 's turned harlot, and gone away with that young scamp Latimer, that can't be the object."

"I should not wonder if he went poaching the game," said Miss Mathilda. "Edmonds complains very much that there 's continually some depredation committed; and perhaps that 's where all his ready money comes from."

"Poo, nonsense!" said Mr. Crump, who did not seem to have learned in Mallington that malignity scorns all the bounds of probability, and is not checked by gross absurdity itself.

"Poo, nonsense!" cried Miss Mathilda. "You think yourself very wise, Mr. Crump; but you do not know half the things that go on in the world, I can tell you. I once saw as handsome and genteel a young man, and as well dressed, too, as ever you saw in your life, hanged for highway robbery. Sister and I paid one pound eleven and sixpence for a window, and saw him as plain as I see you. He was dressed in a suit of fine black, bran new, with a white broad-hemmed cravat and weepers on, and he had got a crape hat-band round his hat, as if he was going to his own funeral, poor young man. Quite a gentleman, I assure you. This Mr. Morton is nothing to him. — Poo, nonsense, indeed!— If it isn't poaching, it 's something a great deal worse, I dare say.

I know he has sent three or four large packages up to London by the stage coach, and no one knows what was in them. I think the magistrate should be informed that he 's always hanging about the park."

"You had better tell Dr. Western," said Mr. Crump. "There he goes down the hill."

"Poo! Dr. Western 's no better than an old woman," said Miss Mathilda. "No, if I tell anybody — and I 've great mind to — it shall be Mr. Middleton. He 's something like a magistrate."

"I think we get nothing but odd people, whom nobody knows," said Miss Martin, who had got a little tired of the subject of Mr. Morton, and was less staunch upon the scent of a scandal of any kind than her sister, though the older dog of the two — "there 's that man, now, down at the Bagpipes."

"What, Gibbs?" said Mr. Crump.

"Gibbs? no," replied Miss Martin; "though Gibbs and he are a good deal about together, too. I mean that great heavy odd-looking man, with the low-crowned hat."

"Men say he 's a Bow-street officer," replied Mr. Crump; "but I dare say they know little about it, for I cannot say I had it from the best authority."

"If he is, I 'll warrant he 's come down to look after this fellow Morton," observed Miss Mathilda.

"I 've seen him twice walk up as if he were going towards Mallington House," added Miss Martin; "perhaps it was to watch what this Morton was about there."

"Ah! he 'll be caught some of these days," rejoined her sister, "if he does not make haste to marry Miss Charlton, for gold is a salve for all sores, they say; but if he does marry her, her guardians are greater fools than I think them, and Mrs. Charlton 's what I always thought her."

"And what 's that, Miss Mathilda?" said Mr. Crump.

"That 's nothing to nobody, Crump," replied the fair lady. "I know better than to speak out, whatever I think. So, go along with you."

And Mr. Crump did go; but the conversation in which he had taken part, was only a specimen of that which was held in

various circles in Mallington. There were in the place, indeed, two factions — a Morton and an Anti-Morton faction — but it is sad to say, notwithstanding all Mr. Morton's many good qualities — and they were conspicuous ones — the Anti-Morton faction was by far the strongest. This may and ought to be accounted for; but the facts were these: — All those whom he dealt largely with were his partisans; but as Mr. Morton was a single man, keeping up no great establishment, the number with whom he dealt largely was not great. The body of the rest of the townsfolks hated him for two very sufficient reasons — first, because he did not deal with them; and, secondly, because they knew nothing about him, and would have liked to know something about him. He acted as a continual blister upon their curiosity; and all reasonable men hate a blister, wherever it is applied. Thus, Mr. Nethersole spoke with profound respect of Mr. Morton, thought him a very distinguished man, evidently of very high breeding and great talents. This was because he had bandaged his head, bled him, and sent him sixteen draughts and three boxes of pills, for all of which he had been handsomely remunerated. The lawyer, on the contrary, ventured to sneer at Mr. Morton, talked about men of straw, shrugged his shoulders, and said people would see what would come of it, which, for a very discreet and silent man, was going somewhat far. But the reason was that Mr. Morton had never during his residence in Mallington employed half a skin of parchment or three inches of red tape.

Happily, however, the means were always in Morton's reach for wiping away such enmities whenever he liked it; and, if the real and very truth must be told, he cared nothing about them; but one day, in the course of the week of which we have been talking, he extinguished at one blow the animosity of the worthy "Solicitor, &c." It so happened that as he was walking up the street, after a call at Dr. Western's, he turned sharp in at the office door, and asked one of the clerks if Mr. Skinner was at home. The clerk replied in the affirmative, and instantly descending from the perilous height on which he was perched, he opened a painted door which led into a room behind — the green

door was hooked back — and announced to Mr. Skinner, who was writing letters within, that "the gentleman" wanted to see him. Now it would seem from the clerk's expression, and from Mr. Skinner's immediately comprehending what it was he meant, that there was only one gentleman in all Mallington — at least, in their opinion. However, out came Mr. Skinner immediately, with spectacles on his long and somewhat fox-like nose, down which they slipped very nearly to the apex — as very well they might, considering the steepness of the declivity — and with a profound bow he ushered his visitor into the interior of his temple, where the clerks could hear a few murmured words, but could not discover their import. It is not improbable that the lesser of the two might, in the long run, have been tempted to put his ear to the door; but just as he had got one leg off the stool for that purpose Mr. Skinner himself appeared, drew to the green door, fastened it within, and shut to the wooden one. All communication was now cut off; they might fret their hearts to bow-strings, or to fiddle-strings either, without discovering a word of what passed; but the result was that the young gentleman remained with the elderly lawyer for nearly an hour, and at the end of that time Mr. Skinner showed him out with the most profound deference and humility. Not a word passed in regard to the subject of their intercourse — not a single syllable, though Mr. Skinner sat up that night till half-past twelve, writing letters and papers with his own hand, and ever after declared that Mr. Morton was indeed a very gentlemanly man, and evidently a person of distinction. His conversion, however, had no effect upon the rest of the citizens. Though his opinion was of value — though he was not a man to be done, cheated, taken in, deceived, or imposed upon, yet the great bulk of the good people of Mallington remained obdurate in their infidelity, and, headed by the Misses Martin, seemed only the more acerb and virulent from the loss of the co-operation of Mr. Skinner.

That very night there was a little party of four assembled to take tea at Miss Martin's; and how they did enjoy themselves! If Mr. Morton had been a haunch of venison, he could not have supplied them with more delicate food. They cut him up, and

carved at him, and hewed him into all manner of shapes. Mr. and Mrs. Dixon — between whom and the Misses Martin once raged the most deadly enmity — had now found favour with the two spinsters, and having amassed a little money, acquired a considerable fund of gossip, and increased in spleen as they grew old, were quite of the Martin coterie. They were their two co-operators on the present occasion, especially Mrs. Dixon, who was a tall, large-boned, gaunt woman, with the frame of a life-guardsman, and the face of a hyena. Her character was a very determined one; she had no fears, no scruples; she herself declared that she always spoke out what she thought; and, to do her but justice, she did that and more, whenever the reputation of another human creature was concerned. She boldly pronounced Mr. Morton to be no more than a swindler; and when the junior Miss Martin communicated to her all her own doubts and suspicions regarding that gentleman, and the excellent grounds upon which they were founded, Mrs. Dixon replied "Well, Mathilda, if I were you, and possessed all the information you possess, I would lose no time in communicating it to a magistrate: that I would. It 's positive duty, my dear."

"No, no!" said Mr. Dixon, who was a small, thin, pale-faced man, with a reddish nose rather turned up, which looked as if he had always caught cold. "No, no, don't you meddle. If people is such fools to be cheated, let 'em be cheated. Why should you stop 'em. Put the case so, Miss Mathilda: let us suppose that Mr. Morton is a swindler, or anything you like — I say nothing, though I confess it looks very like it — well, but supposing that it is so, and you goes away to Mr. Middleton, or any one else, and tells him what you thinks upon the case. Well, then Mr. Middleton asks you for your proofs, and then there 's a rumpus. You can prove nothing. Lord bless you! these swindlers take good care that nobody shall be able to prove nothing against them. If you 're asked, if Mr. Morton ever said he was a gentleman born, you can't say he ever did. As far as I 've heard, he never spoke a word about his self to nobody. No, no, he knows better. You can't have him up for getting goods on false pretences, even if Miss Louisa were at the top of the lot. He might prosecute you for calumny."

"No, but" — replied Miss Martin, the elder, who was fond of vigorous measures done dexterously — "Mathilda might go up to Squire Middleton's in a quiet slip-my-over kind of way, and tell him about the beautiful ribands we have got from town, in case he should like to give some to his cousin, Miss Jones, as he did last year; and then she can slide in a word about Mrs. Charlton; and that will soon bring it round to Mr. Morton; and then she can tell him her mind, do you see, without making it a regular sort of eggs-o'fishy information."

After much debate, thus was it settled that Miss Mathilda Martin should do; and thus she did do, not a little to the satisfaction of Mr. Middleton, who, to say the truth, had no great predilection for Mr. Morton, and who was well pleased to find that there were people in Mallington who liked that gentleman as little as he did himself. He communicated the fact to his two sons, who were equally delighted with their papa; and Miss Martin had the satisfaction of finding, not only that she had given pleasure to several of her fellow-creatures, but that she had also sold twelve yards of riband, at one-and-threepence halfpenny per yard, by her manœuvre.

CHAPTER XL.

In the meantime, Mr. Prior had set about his work very quietly. Having secured a bed at the Bagpipes, seen Mr. Morton, and returned to the inn, he sat himself down in the commercial room, as it was called, and quietly considered his ground, and looked about him. He courted no conversation — he looked dull and reserved — he gave himself none of the airs of inquiry, or of Bow-street-officerism; but while he ate his mutton chop, and drank his pint of ale, seemingly not looking at anybody or anything in the room — though one glance as he entered had sufficed to gather them all up, and note them down in the pocket-book of memory — he overheard everything that was said around him, and judged, with the utmost professional skill, the characters of those who sat at the different tables round the room.

There was a pale man, with a blue beard, at one of these tables,

dressed in a black coat and grey breeches, who sighed frequently over a plate of boiled beef and a glass of gin-and-water.

"A walker of the Tract Society," said Mr. Prior to himself, as he eyed him.

At another were seated two men—one in a blue coat and bright yellow buttons, with well worn, but not well cleaned yellow breeches, and top-boots sadly in want of oxalic acid. The other, with a green Newmarket coat, a fancy button, brown cloth trousers, and boots with spurs over them: a fresh-coloured blue-eyed youth, with large lips, and curly light hair.

"Sound! Lord bless 'ee, you've only to look at her," said leather breeches, with a screw in his eye. "Why, I trotted her up that blessed hill this morning as hard as I could go. She 's none of mine, or I shouldn't say so much about her; but she 's the genuine property of a gentleman who wants a little hard cash. So take her or leave her, just as you like. I 've no interest in the matter. I 'm sure to get twenty guineas more for her at Sturton, only I want to get on to Oxford, where there 's to be a sale o' Tuesday."

"A horse couper and his cully," said Mr. Prior, internally. "He 'll do him."

At a third table appeared Mr. Gibbs, with his long ringlets flowing, and dropping odours, though not wine. He looked about him, sadly at a loss for somebody on whom to bestow a description of the fragant Balm of Trinidad. The horse couper was hopeless, for it was evident that his hair was never trimmed but with the same shears that cut his horses' manes and tails — never oiled but by the sweat of his brow, and only powdered by the dust of the road or the market place. To the dispenser of tracts, the Balm of Trinidad would have been an abomination. But the young country cully gave him some hope; for his fair curls were so crisp and dry as to excite Mr. Gibbs's compassion. He would have fain watered them on the spot with his fragrant balm, and was only waiting for an opportunity of fairly introducing its universal qualities to his notice, when Mr. Prior entered the room, and took his seat in the left hand corner. Mr. Gibbs's eye instantly followed him, and rested upon the close-cut black hair, which seemed as

if intended to have a wig over it, with a look of great despondency. It was a hopeless field upon which he almost despaired even of the fragrant Balm of Trinidad producing any effect.

Nevertheless, the brief glance of Mr. Prior was sufficient to make that gentleman expect something more from Mr. Gibbs; and when, as he was proceeding with his mutton chop, the girl of the house entered, and Mr. Gibbs called her "Betsey," and moreover told her to tell "Mrs. Pluckrose" so and so, Mr. Prior was confirmed in his previous opinion, that he should get something out of Mr. Gibbs, "For," said he to himself, "he has been here some time, that 's clear, and knows the place and the people." Prior bided his time, however, and listened attentively, when Mr. Gibbs, joining in the conversation between the cully and the horse couper, ventured to recommend to the former the fragrant Balm of Trinidad, much to the indignation of the latter, who did not like his dealings to be interrupted.

"He 's a perfumer," said Mr. Prior mentally, and a minute or two after, Mr. Gibbs sat down, rebuffed by the brutality of the horse couper and the indifference of his chapman. After having finished his mutton chop, and drank his ale, the Bow-street officer called for a glass of brandy-and-water, and then, as if the icy shackles of reserve had been thawed by that warm and potent beverage, he put on a brisker look, gazed about him, and entered into conversation with his companions of the commercial room. He made his approaches by degrees, indeed — first speaking a word to the tract distributor, then saying something in a somewhat jeering tone to the dealer in horse flesh, which called for a pretty sharp reply.

"Ah, yes," answered Prior. "I 've seen you before, I think. Weren't you the man that was pulled up one day for selling two glandered horses in Smithfield?" and he looked him full in the face, as if he had known all about it, though to say truth, he spoke but from a random suspicion that such an event might very well have formed part of his good friend's history at some period or another. The horse dealer repelled the insinuation with indignation; to which Mr. Prior merely replied, "Well, don't put yourself in a passion, I only asked you a question, my good

friend;" and then, turning to Mr. Gibbs, he added, "Such a thing isn't unlikely to any man in his way of life, is it, Sir?"

Mr. Gibbs did not venture an opinion upon the subject, but a conversation immediately began between him and the officer, while the two personages at the other table arose and quitted the room, probably to inspect the horse, which one of them had for sale.

"I thought it best to give that young fellow a hint," said Prior, in a confidential tone, "for I 'm quite sure that jockey will do him, if he doesn't look sharp. I 'll bet you a glass of brandy-and-water that the horse he 's going to sell him is spavined, or sand-cracked, or broken kneed, or has some screw loose or another, and yet he'll go and buy him, and pay a pretty penny."

"There 's nothing so good on earth for broken knees," said Mr. Gibbs, "as the fragrant Balm of Trinidad. Why, my dear Sir, it will make the hair come upon the baldest places: it would make the back of your hand in a fortnight like a bottle brush."

"It 's not much unlike that at present;" said Mr. Prior, looking down at his great hirsute paw; "but suppose, Sir, we take a glass together. What shall it be? Hot with sugar, or cold without?"

Mr. Gibbs would take anything that his companion thought proper; and they were soon in full talk, during the flow of which the officer ascertained that Mr. Gibbs had been now for several weeks in that identical little town of Mallington. He moreover discovered that he was not exactly a perfumer, but the traveller for a great London perfumery house, and he asked himself, with the true inquiring spirit of his character, what could have induced such a person to pitch his tent for such a length of time in a spot that offered so few inducements to one of his calling. He found, likewise, that Mr. Gibbs knew something of almost everybody in Mallington; and, therefore, that his own sagacity had not deceived him in pitching upon him as an informant. There were certain subjects, however, upon which the worthy patron of the Balm of Trinidad was rather shy; for having his own views and determinations, and not knowing the character of his collocutor, he could not divine that there, upon the chair opposite to him,

sat the man of all others who was most likely to help him. Thus, when Mr. Prior propounded to him the following sage observation, "There 's been a good deal of ugly work going on here lately, I hear," he merely replied, "So it seems."

"A gentleman has been knocked down upon the common and robbed a night or two ago," continued Prior.

"Yes, so I find," replied Mr. Gibbs.

The blue-bearded vendor of tracts, over-hearing this awful notification, looked at the large clock over the mantelpiece, and having to walk five or six miles that night, drank up the remains of his gin-and-water, paid his score, and quitted the premises. Prior, however, sat immovably fixed opposite Mr. Gibbs, sipping the contents of his own rummer, and calculating what made his companion so reserved upon the particular subject before them. He resolved to pursue his point, nevertheless, and added, after a short period of reflection, "I should like to know somewhat more of that affair."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Gibbs. "Why so? How does it concern you?"

"Oh, it concerns me a little," said Prior; "I may tell you how by and by. Pray do you know anything of a man named Williams here?"

"Oh, yes," replied Gibbs, in an indifferent tone; "I know something of him, but not much."

"What sort of character does he bear?" demanded the officer.

"Why, the people about give him a very indifferent character," answered the traveller; "but I say nothing, for I don't like to speak what I can't prove."

"Quite right, Mr. Thompson — quite right," replied Prior, "that 's the best way in every court."

"My name is Gibbs, Sir," answered the traveller, with a dignified air.

"Ah, yes, I beg your pardon, Mr. Gibbs," rejoined the officer; "nevertheless, I should like to hear something more of this Jack Williams. He helped the gentleman home, it seems, that was knocked down."

"He didn't help me home, though I was knocked down too," said Mr. Gibbs, in an incautious moment.

"Ah! — so you were knocked down too, were you?" was the officer's rejoinder. "Well, I should like to hear about that, too," and he proceeded to cross-question Mr. Gibbs in a way that gentleman found it impossible to escape from. By this means he wormed out of Mr. Gibbs the whole story of his adventure in Wenlock Wood — the apprehension of Williams upon suspicion — his discharge, upon what seemed to the officer very insufficient testimony — and, as one confession begat another, Mr. Gibbs ended by avowing that he was determined not to quit Mallington till he had discovered the robber.

"Whom you still suspect to be Jack Williams," said Prior, "notwithstanding all that 's said and done."

"No, no," replied Mr. Gibbs, "I didn't say that; I suspect nobody."

"However, I 'm different," said Prior, "for I suspect everybody. That 's a part of my trade;" and leaning his two arms upon the table, he bent his head over them, saying, in a low tone, "I am an officer from Bow-street, Mr. Gibbs, and have come down to look after this affair; but that 's between you and me. I don't wish people to know what I 'm about, and perhaps shouldn't have told you, if it hadn't been that I 've been seen by one chap that knows me; so it 's likely to come out any way, which is a pity. However, you and I can chat the matter over, and I 'll tell you one thing to begin with. Williams was the man who knocked you down, you may be sure of that; and if he did not do this other business, he had a finger in the pie."

Mr. Gibbs no longer affected to deny the suspicions that he really entertained, but, delighted with the prospect of such aid and assistance as he was likely to receive from a Bow-street officer, poured forth the long dammed up stream of his communicativeness, told all that he had done — how he had watched, spied, and dogged the object of his doubts — and gave Mr. Prior a full insight, as far as he could give it, into everything that had taken place in Mallington during the last month.

Prior congratulated himself upon his success, and bestowed

great commendations upon Mr. Gibbs's skill, perseverance, and ingenuity, exclaiming, "Why, with a little teaching and practice you would do for the office, Mr. Gibbs; but now I must find out this fellow Williams, and have a talk with him."

"Oh! that will be easy enough," replied the traveller, with a knowing wink of the eye; "he 's a great friend of mine is Jack Williams. I invited him here to drink a bowl of punch with me, and tried to get him to change a ten-pound note, because, you see, amongst the guineas I had about me when I was robbed there was one of Queen Anne, with the least little bit filed out of the edge, so that I could have sworn to it; but he was too deep, and he wouldn't change the note; and I don't know how it was, but either the punch must have been very strong, or something; for by the time we got to the end of the first bowl I felt as drowsy as if I had drank a whole bottle of the American Soothing Syrup, and in a minute or two after I was sound asleep."

"You must have left the room for a minute," said Prior.

"No, I didn't," answered Mr. Gibbs; "nor the table either — yes, by the way, I did leave the table; I went to get out some of the fragrant Balm of Trinidad, but that was only at the other side of the room."

"Ay, he hocussed your liquor, for all that," replied the officer; "he must have been up to something that day, and didn't want to be watched."

Mr. Gibbs mused for a minute or two, and then said, "I dare say you 're right, for that was the very day when that wild young blade, Mr. Latimer, carried off the park-keeper's pretty daughter, and Williams had a hand in that affair I know" — and then came the whole story of Lucy and her abduction by Mrs. Charlton's son.

Prior listened attentively, picking out from the somewhat long-winded statement of Mr. Gibbs whatever suited his own purpose, as throwing light upon the character of Jack Williams, just as an industrious sempstress, from a great bundle of thread, chooses out those skeins and colours that are necessary for the work she has in hand. He had settled it in his own mind long before this that if indeed Williams was not the man who actually

struck the blow that brought Mr. Morton to the ground upon the common, he was an accessory either before or after the fact; and it was a great object with him to get such an insight into his habits and disposition as would enable him to recover Mr. Morton's pocket-book in the speediest manner. When the whole story was brought to a conclusion, however, he returned to the charge about seeing the person in question, and Mr. Gibbs professed his readiness to lead him that moment to the house where Williams lodged. The officer was not inclined to delay; and out they both sallied into the streets of Mallington. Near the door, however, they suddenly encountered Captain Tankerville, with an extravagantly smart, but somewhat brazen-looking lady on his arm, and the meeting did not seem particularly satisfactory to that respectable gentleman. For a moment — for a single moment he appeared to hesitate whether he should recognise Prior or not; but the devil of habitual impudence had possession of him, and he gave the officer a cool, condescending nod, such as the fashionable gentleman might bestow upon a person whom he had employed in such functions as those of the police.

Prior understood the matter perfectly, perceived all the most minute springs and wheels that were moving in Captain Tankerville's mind, but did not choose that they should produce the result intended, and, therefore, pausing with a familiar shake of the head, he said, "Ah, Captain, you down here! What 's the go now? I should think that this was no lay for you. There can't be much business doing in your way here."

"I wanted a little country air, Prior," replied Captain Tankerville, moving on.

"Why, I heard you had been taking country air over in Surrey," answered the officer, with a laugh; and he too pursued his way with Mr. Gibbs up the hill, asking his companion as they went whether "that chap had been long down in those parts?"

"Oh! dear no," answered Mr. Gibbs; "the first time I ever saw him was yesterday."

"I was thinking," said Prior, "whether he could have anything to do with these jobs. He 's just a likely fellow to put other men up to a bad piece of business, and then turn stag. It won't

be long before he weighs his weight now; and so if he 's had any hand in this, we could soon get at it from him."

"I don't think it," answered Gibbs. "He 's never been here before since I 've been in the place, and this has been going on a long while."

"Well, we shall see," answered Prior; "but we 'll talk to Williams first. You show me where he lives, and I 'll go in and have a chat with him."

"Oh! I 'll show you directly," replied the traveller, "and then we can talk more about the matter when you 've done with him."

The two worthy gentlemen, however, were disappointed in their expectations. Gibbs led his companion up the hill, and then some way down a lane which branched off from the edge of the high road just opposite Mallington House. First came two or three poor cottages — then a field and a garden — then a small red brick house, with some cakes, parliament, gingerbread, and apples in the window; while over the door was inscribed "Pickett, dealer in tea, sugar, coffee, snuff, and tobacco," and this was pointed out to the worthy officer as the present abode of Mr. John Williams. But on inquiring in the shop, while Gibbs walked slowly up the lane, the reply of the woman of the house was, that her lodger had not been home for two days, and that she did not know when he would return.

"Are you sure he 'll return at all?" asked the officer, in a cynical tone.

"Oh dear, yes,' replied the woman; "he 's sure to come back, for he 's left all his things."

Prior paused for a moment with an unusual degree of hesitation. His habitual propensities impelled him strongly to walk up stairs, and to examine into the facts and circumstances of what things Mr. Williams had left behind him; but recollecting that, in order to obtain what Mr. Morton wanted, he must "do his spiriting gently," he forbore, and merely requested the worthy lady to inform Mr. Williams that a gentleman had been to see him; that he was lodging at the Bagpipes, and would be glad of a call as soon as her lodger came back

He retrod his steps, hurrying his pace a little to overtake Gibbs, and soon perceived him walking slowly along in conversation with another person. With his keen quick eye Prior scanned the figure of the good traveller's companion, while a slight smile curled his lip; and then walking up to the personage who was still busily talking with Gibbs, he laid his broad hand heavily upon his shoulder. Bill Maltby, for he it was, turned round with a start, and the moment he saw Prior, turned as pale as death.

CHAPTER XLI.

"Ah, Master Maltby, you down here!" said Prior, fixing his keen eye upon the other's countenance, and marking the waning colour in his cheek with a slight smile; for the ancient Bow-street officer, he of the potent old school — long since softened down into what is called a preventive force, which, God wot, prevents little to compensate for the evils that it perpetrates or encourages — he of the ancient school, I say, which could really detect the criminal almost as soon as the crime was committed, and which commanded the best means of prevention by ensuring immediate punishment, felt some degree of self-satisfaction at the awe with which his presence affected any notorious offender, — "Ah, Master Maltby, you down here! Still upon the small go, I suppose — nothing heavy yet, or I should have heard of you, Master Maltby."

Although the speech of the excellent Mr. Prior was not altogether pleasant to the ears of Bill Maltby, especially being delivered, as it was, in the presence of Mr. Gibbs, yet it was so far satisfactory that it showed him that the especial errand of the worthy officer in Mallington did not refer to himself. He therefore replied, with a re-assured countenance, and in a civil tone, "Oh no, Mr. Prior; I am down here in my native place, living a very quiet life now."

"I dare say," answered the officer, in that peculiar tone which implied that he dared to say nothing of the kind. "Well, we shall see, Bill; but there 's one little thing I should like to

speak to you about — as a friend, you know, quite as a friend, for I am only taking the country air, travelling incog. for my amusement, like other great men — no business in life, Bill, but just a little holiday — so if you could just make it convenient to give me a call at the Bagpipes some time this evening, I should like to have a little talk with you about one or two things."

"Oh, I 'll come, certainly, Sir," replied Bill Maltby, who was quite sure that if Prior wanted him for any unpleasant purpose he would have had the handcuffs on him in less time than it had taken to speak one quarter of what he had uttered; "at what time shall I come?"

"Why, in about an hour," said Prior; "then we can have a glass of wine together. In the mean time, I want to talk a little with this gentleman;" and though Maltby did not altogether like the prospect of any long communion between Mr. Gibbs and his friend of Bow-street, he had no excuse ready for not walking away, which he did, reiterating his promise to come at the appointed time.

No sooner was he gone than Mr. Gibbs proceeded to inquire into the personal character of Mr. Maltby; and when he heard the circumstances of the officer's acquaintance with him, he in return related the fact of his having been wheedled over to Sturton on the very day when he was knocked down and robbed.

"Ah!" said Prior, in a meditative tone; "then he 's a confederate of Jack Williams, is he? I thought it must be so; but we 'll try if we can't make the decoy duck quack as far as is needful. A pretty gang of them there seems to be hereabouts just now; but our London gents do love, every now and then, to see a bit of country life. He must be a shrewd hand, this Jack Williams, not ta take your flimsies, Mr. Gibbs. You won't be able to do anything with him; for, take my word for it, he 's got as sharp an eye for a Queen Anne guinea as you have; and I 'll bet you any money it 's in the soup-pot long before this time."

"He 'll not stop there, Sir," replied Mr. Gibbs, "depend upon it he 'll not stop there. When once a man begins he 's sure to go on."

"Ah! there you 're right, there you 're quite right," replied

Mr. Prior. "That shows you know something of life, Mr. Gibbs; and as soon as he weighs his weight we shall have him."

In conversation of this kind they pursued their way back to the Bagpipes; and the officer, to use the reporter's term, subjected the worthy traveller to a searching cross-examination in regard to everything and everybody in Mallington; after which Prior retired to his own chamber, and ordered a bottle of wine, much to the astonishment of Mrs. Pluckrose, who entertained a notion that wine was only fit for gentlefolks, in which class she had not thought fit to include her new guest. Shortly afterwards Bill Maltby, true to his appointment, appeared at the inn door; but had very nearly been sent away again, as Prior had not thought fit to communicate his name, and it was only by description that the barmaid was at length brought to understand who was the person asked for. When at length all difficulties were overcome, and Mr. Maltby was ushered up to the officer's room, which was tolerably high in the building, he was received by Prior with a sort of condescending courtesy, requested to seat himself, and had his glass filled with wine as a preliminary. He looked a little anxiously for the commencement of the discourse; but Prior filled his own glass, nodded, and gave "The King." When this toast was drunk the officer filled again for both, and then, scratching a certain spot a little behind the temple, which was accustomed to be scratched upon important occasions, he entered upon business.

"Well, Mr. Maltby," he said, "so you are down here taking your native air. That 's right, that 's quite right. Here 's your health. You are a young man who know how to take care of yourself, and I dare say may go on a long way, if you don't go too fast. But what I wanted to say is this, you are acquainted with a gentleman of the name of Williams, I think?"

Maltby nodded his head.

"And do a little business with him in a quiet way, I dare say," continued the officer.

"Oh dear, no," answered Maltby; "I 've given up that sort of thing; and besides, Mr. Williams is quite a different sort of

person. He 's only here for a while till he gets another ship, and spends his prize-money."

"Come, come, now," answered Prior, in a tone of jocular reproach; "as if I didn't know, Bill. What 's the use coming that lay with me. Besides, I am not looking after the young man to do him any harm; I 've got no warrant against him, bless you; I 've got a little bit of business to do with him which may turn to his good. So, if you know where he is to be found, speak out like a man."

"No, I don't know," replied Maltby; "I haven't set eyes on him these three days, and was going up to see if he had come home when I met you. But what is it about, Mr. Prior. Perhaps I can help you, notwithstanding."

"Ah! that 's another affair," answered Prior, meditating; and Bill Maltby ventured to add "If it 's about the job of that fellow Gibbs, you are mistaken, I can tell you. Jack Williams wasn't in Mallington at the time."

"You were," answered Prior, turning his eyes suddenly upon him.

"That 's neither here nor there," answered Maltby, with a perceptible change of countenance. "He wasn't, that 's sure."

"He might not be very far off, though," answered the officer, with a grim smile; "but, however, it 's not about that at all. I 've nothing to do with that, and I mind my own business. I know what I know, and if it were needful, could take you all over the ground, and show you how he came, and how he went, and where he stood, just as if I had seen it all. But, as I said, that 's no affair of mine. I 've no warrant. What I 'm after now is this business of Mr. Morton's; and look you, Bill, I 'm determined — and you know I 'm the man to do it — either to have the papers or to have the men. The money they may keep, and perhaps may have a trifle more, of twenty pounds or so, if they give up the pocket-book quietly and quick."

"I didn't know any pocket-book had been taken," answered Maltby; "and if it has, most likely they 've burnt it. They 're not likely to keep a sticky thing like that."

"Then I 'll have the man," said Prior, in a determined tone.

"Well, I can't help you there," replied Maltby, drinking down his wine with a gulp; "but one thing I'm very sure of, Williams was not the man to knock the gentleman down. Of that I give you my honour."

Small rogues are men of honour, as well as great ones — in their own particular way.

"I 'll have him, and the other fellow, too," answered Prior, "and then you know, Master Maltby, that this business of Gibbs's must be gone into; so you can judge whether that will be pleasant, and had better look to it. It will be much better for them to give up the papers and the pocket-book quietly, and then they can go on till another time, you know; but if they don't, they 're done; and some others may find themselves in a mess, who, if they don't cut capers, would find themselves lagged to Botany for life; and that 's not pleasant."

"No," said Bill Maltby, in what we romance-writers call a tone of deep feeling; and thereupon he fell into a fit of meditation, which lasted several minutes uninterrupted.

"Does the gentleman suspect Jack Williams?" he inquired at length.

"Lord bless you, no," replied Prior, laughing, "he thinks him a very honest fellow, as I dare say he is in his way. I don't mean to say he knocked him down; but there are such things as accessories before and after the fact, my good Sir; and, even if he were to get out of this, there 's weight enough upon him, I can tell you, to pull the rope tight, if things were looked into; and it 's much better a young man should be quiet, and give up a trifle like this pocket-book, which can be of no use to him, than to hang about shilly-shally for the chance of a better reward. Twenty pounds is very handsome, I think, and I dare say the gentleman wouldn't stand for five pounds more or less."

"Well, I tell you, Mr. Prior, upon my soul, that Williams had nothing to do with it, I know," answered Maltby; "and I can't tell anything about the papers, for I never heard of them; but I think I know where I can find out whether they are burnt or not, and, if not, I dare say they 'll be given up."

"If they are given up, all may be kept as still as an empty

trunk," replied Prior; "if not, I must have the men, and then there will be some precious work. You must be quick, however, Bill; for you see I can't dawdle away my time and let matters slip; we must go to work at once either one way or the other."

Bill Maltby fell into a new fit of thought, and rubbed his head continuously, as if to stimulate the organ of cogitation. At length he brought forth, as if by a jerk, the following question, "Would you mind taking a long walk with me to-night, Mr. Prior?"

"Not particular," replied Prior, "I want a little exercise."

"Well, I think," said Maltby, "I could get you to speak with a young man who knows something of this job; but, mind, it 's only upon condition that you do nothing against him."

"Not to-night, not to-night, of course!" replied the officer. "Honour, Bill! — honour! I 'm upon a negociation now; and I know what that means as well as the best plenipo of them all. Before I begin active operations of course I shall declare war; but it 's to be the same on both sides, remember. We must have no traps, Bill."

"Oh dear, no, Mr. Prior," replied Bill Maltby. "That would be devilish little good; for though you 're keen enough, there are plenty more besides yourself; and you always behave pleasant and gentlemanly, which is more than many of them do."

"Well, I 'm your man," said Prior; "only I must just go and tell that Mr. Gibbs that I can't drink tea with him to-night. We had better set out at once, I think, for it 's beginning to grow duskish."

"Let it get a little darker first," replied Maltby, "for I don't well know how these fellows may like it."

"That 's just as you please," replied Prior; "and we 've got the bottle to finish, too; so you take another glass, while I go and tell Gibbs, for he 's expecting me, I think."

Thus saying, the officer left the room; and Bill Maltby helped himself to another glass of wine; but that was the only movement that he made. He did not even venture to look round him, but remained seated where he had first taken up his position, as if he were afraid that Prior might see on his return if his chair were

moved in the least degree out of the same situation. Throughout the whole of their conversation, as the reader has, doubtless, observed, the swaggering, bullying dare-devil has been changed into the meek, compliant, very humble servant of the officer; and such, indeed, was the influence of those myrmidons of old Bow-street, that it seldom if ever happened, in dealing with habitual ruffians, that they met with anything like resistance. It was only when they came to encounter — as in the case of poor Smithers with the Cato-street gang — some persons who from accidental excitement had jumped at once to a great crime, that they were opposed with anything like violence; and it is a well-known fact that a single officer would venture unhesitatingly into one of the most notorious dens of London, and pick out of a man who knew his fate was sealed, from the midst of a whole gang of foodpads, housebreakers, and murderers, without any one of them ever dreaming of an attempt to rescue their companion or injure the officer. The utmost courtesy, too, existed between the rogues and those who apprehended them; and when a man was thus taken up, in the midst of his companions, there was no swagger, or threat, or loud announcement of his purpose on the part of the officer; but, merely beckoning him out, he was wont to say, "Mr. So-and-so, I wish to speak with you for a moment," in the civilest tone possible, though he was about to take him to prison and to death; and it generally happened that the man's only reply to this fell summons was, when they were alone together, "Pray don't put the darbies on me," with an assurance that he would go along quite quietly unmanacled. Such was the effect produced upon every individual of a large class of men by the mere aspect of those to whom the law entrusted the terrible task of watching their proceedings and bringing them to a close when their guilt reached a certain point of enormity; and Maltby was fully under that impression, well knowing that there were many acts, even in the course of his short life, which brought him within the reach of the iron arm of justice. In the present instance, indeed, there was a predominant fear that awed him into the most submissive tranquillity in the presence of the officer. It were needless, and perhaps unfair, to inquire whether it would have induced him to turn

informer, and betray his companions; but it certainly would have brought him to do anything short of that. The part which he had taken in the robbery of Gibbs was perhaps sufficient, as the law then stood, to put his head within the unpleasant circle of a rope. He had prompted and planned the robbery — he had shared the spoil — he had been an accessory, both before and after the fact — and it was clear to him that Prior very well knew the share he had in it. Men who have committed evil acts are always inclined to suppose that others who suspect them have better information than they really have; and he attributed the hints which the officer had given regarding the real state of the case, rather to actual knowledge than mere suspicion. It is, indeed, conscience that makes cowards of us all; and he sat considering the fearful phantoms of his imagination, and thinking how he might drive them from him, till Prior returned.

In the meanwhile that worthy gentleman had visited Mr. Gibbs, and though he entertained no positive fear or hesitation in regard to accompanying Bill Maltby, whithersoever he might lead him, yet he thought it might be just as well to take some precautionary measures, and consequently asked his new-found friend to watch which way he and his companion went, without actually dogging their steps, and to sit up for him till he returned.

"If I 'm not back by twelve," he said, "it may be as well to seek for me. Not that I think anything is likely to happen; but still you know men's blood will get up, and they may take a drop or two of spirits more than needful, and then there 's no saying what they may do. So I shall leave you, Mr. Gibbs, to look out for me."

This being settled, the officer returned to the room where he had left his companion, eyed him well to ascertain what he had been about during his own absence, finished the bottle according to their previous determination, and then proceeding to the goods and chattels which lay in the window, he drew forth a tolerably large pair of pistols.

"It 's always as well," he said, examining the powder in the pans, and pressing down the ramrod tight in each, "It 's always as well, Mr. Maltby, to be provided with the barkers, though I

am quite sure you would not behave ungentlemanly towards me. However, I never go far without them, and so there 's no offence in putting them in my pocket."

"Oh, no, none at all — none at all," answered Bill Maltby; "but you 'll not have to use them, Sir, I can tell you."

"Likely," answered the officer; "but now let 's go. It will be quite dark before we are up the hill."

"We 're not going up the hill," answered Maltby. "But I 'll show you the way," and accordingly he walked to the door.

We have led the gentle reader, by the hand, all about the little town of Mallington, along the road, over the common, and the sandy way which skirted it, by the cottage where poor Lucy Edmonds passed her first night of absence from her father's house, down the back lanes, and through the fields to the water side, and along the river, by the rectory, back to the bottom of the hill. We have also led him across the bridge, and through several of the paths of Mallington Park, along the road on that side of the river, and up the sandy lane leading away to Wenlock Common and Wood. Then, proceeding across the heath, we have taken him, in company with Jack Williams, after his assault upon Mr. Gibbs, round by the other side of Mallington Park and back to the bridge. If we had been the surveyor of the roads for that district, we could not have laid them out with greater accuracy — all except one. Have you ever looked upon a map, dear reader, in which a river figured as the principal object? — you must have found that, if there was a bridge over it, it generally presented you with the letter H, the bridge forming the cross of the letter, and a road on either side the two limbs. Now our H wants one of its very principal parts, which must be immediately supplied. That is neither more nor less than the superior portion of the left hand limb. The highway through the village, which was called Mallington-street, taking a little turn round the angle formed by the inn, swept over the bridge. On the right hand it was joined by the road to the rectory and the church; but we have said nothing of any way, highway or by-path, leading further up the river on the Mallington side, and have thus, perhaps, left the reader's imagination to suppose that the inn named the Bagpipes, its gar-

dens, sheds, or outbuildings, actually abutted upon the river, or else that fields and hedges closed the way, and left nothing but the milkmaid's path and the urchin's beloved stile. Such, however, was not at all the case, and we must hasten to correct this geographical error. The road from the church, the rectory, and the country beyond, did indeed enter upon Mallington-street, and afford a means of communication between the village and the neighbouring residences; but it did more — it crossed the highway, and was continued along the bank of the water, sometimes approaching close to it, sometimes leaving a meadow or two between, as the circuitous process of nature deviated from the straightforward proceeding of art.

It was up this road, then, that Bill Maltby, on the night in question, led Mr. Prior, shortly after the sun had set under the horizon. There was more light, however, than the former personage had calculated upon; for though the evening was somewhat grey, and thin wreaths of white mist might be seen twisting about upon various parts of the stream, yet the twilight had not completely ended, and in many parts the river shone out clear, reflecting all the light that still remained in the sky. Bill Maltby walked slowly, and his companion did not hurry him on, letting him follow the bent of his own inclinations, but at the same time watching all his proceedings with a keen and shrewd observation.

"He wants to prevent me finding my way back," said Prior to himself; "but it won't do;" and then remarking that, as they came to the side of some meadows left by a sweep of the stream with a footpath across them, Bill Maltby lifted his head and looked across, but still seemed inclined to follow the high road, though the foot-way evidently joined it further on, he asked aloud, "Had we better not take the path, Bill? — it 's shorter."

Bill Maltby assented, merely murmuring something about its being damp; and then, after a short interval of silence, observed, "You seem to know this part of the country, Mr. Prior?"

"Oh, I know something of most parts," replied the officer; and on they went.

At the distance of about a mile from the village, it became as dark as it was likely to be, and about half a mile further Maltby

deviated from the road they had hitherto been pursuing, and struck into some very intricate lanes upon the left. They were melancholy lanes enough, too — not overhung with embowering shrubs and bushes, but generally with a ditch on one side and some stunted willows on both. The land was flat and unpicturesque, though doubtless affording good feed for cattle; and, as the meadows were not unfrequently under water, the road was generally raised above them. On the left, however, was some high ground, and towards it the two wayfarers gradually approached. though Prior shrewdly suspected that they might have reached it by a much shorter cut. At length the lane they were pursuing entered between two abrupt sandy banks crowned on either side by some young fir plantations, after which it issued forth upon a wide track of wild unproductive ground, where patches of cultivation, encircled by young hedges, amidst a quantity of moor land, showed that efforts were making to reclaim for the use of man a portion of the soil from the waste. It was with difficulty that Prior's eye, although accustomed a good deal to mark objects in the night, caught the indications of the sort of country he was passing through; for the darkness was by this time profound, and no convenient moon shone forth to light the traveller on his way. When they had gone about a quarter of a mile on the moor, however, near a clump of black-looking trees, which, lifted up, upon a little elevation, showed themselves more distinctly than any object around, he thought he perceived one of those tall, single, many-storied houses, which people of a peculiar taste occasionally build upon commons, generally for the purpose of a roadside public-house. No ray of light, however, flashed forth from any window, and for some way the officer was not certain whether fancy did not deceive him.

At length, however, Bill Maltby stopped, and after some humming and hawing, communicated to the officer that he thought he had better go on, and inform the good folks of the business they had in hand. "I may tell them, of course, Mr. Prior," he said, "that they 're all safe if they let you come?"

"As safe as a babe in the cradle," replied Prior. "You know me well enough, Bill, and what sort of man I am. I 'm

never afraid of doing anything I have to do straightforward, so I 've never any occasion to tell lies about it."

"That 's true — that's true," answered Maltby; "so, if you 'll just wait here for five minutes, I 'll go and tell them, and be back again."

Prior agreed to do so; and the young man left him, walking on in the direction of the house which he had seen. When he was gone Prior put his hand in his pocket, took out one of the pistols, felt the pan with a delicate and scientific touch, rammed down the ball once more, to make sure that it had not slipped down in the barrel, and then replaced it in his pocket, leaving the butt to hang out, so as to be ready for his grasp in a moment. All this did not in the least show that he was afraid; for, as I have before said, fear or hesitation were not things that easily entered into his mind; but he was eminently a man of preparation — he was always ready for whatever might come, and always making himself ready for what was to come next; besides, the examination of his pistols was a sort of pastime of which he was fond; and it was serviceable in the present instance by occupying a minute or two of the time he had to wait.

Bill Maltby, indeed, was longer in returning than he had promised; and Prior had full opportunity of examining to the best of his ability the objects round the spot where he stood. Notwithstanding the darkness, notwithstanding the monotony of the scenery around, his habitual powers of observation were such as to enable him to mark accurately several different points, for the purpose of recognising the place again, if ever he should be called upon to visit it; and in order to leave no doubt of the matter, when he found that his companion did not speedily re-appear, he walked up to a thin pollard that stood by the side of the road, and, taking a large knife out of his pocket, cut a deep notch in the bark.

At length, after waiting about a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, he heard a quick step, and, advancing, was met by Maltby, who said in a low voice, "Come, Sir, come; they will speak with you, though they don't like it at all."

"They must be fools," said Prior, "not to like to get a matter

of twenty or five-and-twenty pounds for some scraps of paper that they can do nothing with."

"That 's what I told them," said Bill Maltby.

"Have they got them still?" asked Prior, as they walked along, with the house we have mentioned growing more distinct as they came near.

"I can't tell," answered his companion. "They didn't say; but you 'll soon find out. However, Mr. Prior, it will be all in the dark, for they won't let you see them."

Prior made no reply, but cogitated. He did not much like the idea of going into a place with which he himself was unacquainted, tenanted apparently by a body of men of a daring and violent character, well acquainted with every turning and winding that it contained. He knew and understood the risk; but yet it did not make him pause or hesitate; he only bestowed a little meditation upon the means of insuring himself as far as possible; and consequently, when they came to the door of the lonely and desolate-looking building to which his companion led him, he quietly slipped his hand into his pocket, drew out the two pistols, and, with the one in his right hand and the other in his left, followed Bill Maltby into the dark and narrow passage.

"This way," said his companion, turning through a door on the left; and, immediately the officer had entered, a rough harsh voice, apparently proceeding from a room beyond, communicating with the first by an open door, demanded "Who is there?"

"It 's I and Mr. Prior," replied Maltby.

"Well, you can stay where you are," rejoined the voice; "we can talk as we are without his coming further. What does he want?"

"Why, I want Mr. Morton's pocket-book, and the papers that are in it," answered Prior.

"And why the devil should we give them to you?" rejoined the voice.

"Oh, for several reasons," answered the officer, "which I 'll tell you as soon as you let me know whether the papers are safe; for, if they are not, there 's no use of talking any more about it."

"Oh yes, safe enough!" rejoined the voice. "Now for it, speak out."

"Well, then," said the officer, "I have been sent for from London, in order to get them. The gentleman 's content, if they are restored, to let all other matters sleep, and, moreover, to give a reward of twenty pounds for them. So, if you 've a mind to hand them out, why you can either let me have them now, or send them to me by Mr. Maltby here."

There was a low murmuring at the other side of the partition, as if two people spoke together; and then the voice answered, "They are worth more than that."

"Well, I dare say the gentleman won't stand for five pounds," answered the officer; "but you know, my good fellow, if you ask too much, you may chance to get yourself into trouble. There 's a bit of Bow-street to be set against the value of the papers; and it 's much better worth your while to take a fair offer, and let the matter pass quietly, than risk your neck in the hope of getting more."

"Oh, my neck 's in no risk about it!" answered the man. "I 've not got the papers — I 'm only speaking for another."

"I hear that," replied the officer, drily; "and we are both the same in that respect, for I 'm speaking for another, too."

There was a short pause; and at length a new voice said, "It 's better that principals should deal together; so you may tell Mr. Morton that he shall hear from the person who has got the papers in a day or two, and then he can have them or not at the price put upon them, as he likes."

Since his entrance into that room Prior had used his best endeavours to gain some knowledge of the interior, and as his eye became more accustomed to the obscurity — for there is seldom anything on this earth so utterly deprived of light as to deserve the name of actual darkness — he had made out not only that there was a window upon his left hand, but, also, that there were several broken panes in it, and that there was an open door on the other side. Beyond that, however, he could see nothing; but he marked with strong attention the tones of the two speakers, so that he thought he could swear to the voices whenever he heard

them again. The proposal of the person who had last spoken was not by any means agreeable to him, as he foresaw a possibility of its depriving him of a part, at least, of the sum promised for negotiating the restoration of the papers. It must not be supposed, however, that in his proposing the sum of twenty, or five-and-twenty pounds, instead of fifty, which Mr. Morton had offered for the recovery of his pocket-book, he was influenced by any corrupt desire of transferring the rest to his own pocket. On the contrary, he had only begun with the small sum, in order to leave himself an opportunity of increasing it to the extent permitted, according to circumstances. But, nevertheless, he did not like to be curtailed of his own fair proportion, and he therefore answered, after thinking over it for a moment or two, "Come, say in a word what you will take, and let us see whether we can't make a deal of it at once. It 's better than hanging fire about the thing, because you see I must do my duty one way or another, and if I don't get the papers I must do the other thing."

"You 've got your answer," said the second voice in a stern tone, "and that 's all the answer you 'll get."

"It 's an answer that doesn't quite suit me," replied Prior quietly; "but I 'll let you hear more what I think of it to-morrow."

"What, I suppose you are afraid of losing the reward," said the second voice, after a short murmured consultation, the words of which were indistinct; "but as you have opened the way for him, the gentleman will have no right to refuse you whatever he promised, and if he does it shall be made up to you."

"Much trust there is in that," answered Prior. "However, I 'll think about it, as I said before. You say you 'll let him hear from you in a day or two. Well, I 'll tell him, and talk with him about the matter, and so good night. All I can say further is, that you 'll be great fools if you suffer yourselves to be lagged up to the office by sticking out for too high a price. Many a man has put his neck in a noose by such a go as that; so you look sharp about it."

While he had been thus speaking he had gradually approached the door as silently as possible, and in a minute after stood on the

outside of the house. He had heard some whispered conversation, indeed, as he went; but he did not think fit, after the very significant hints which he had given, to wait for the result. Comparatively the atmosphere without was clear and light after quitting the dark room, and Prior walked along the road back towards Mallington without waiting for his companion. Maltby, however, soon overtook him; but the officer was in no very good humour with the success of his operations; and the only words that passed between them till they reached the entrance of the town were spoken when Maltby endeavoured to lead him by another way, which elicited from the officer the following observation, in a grumbling tone: — "It 's no use, Bill, I know the road as well as you do. You call upon me about twelve to-morrow, and I 'll tell you more. Those fellows will make a mess of it if they don't mind; but it 's their own fault, so there 's no help for it."

CHAPTER XLII.

It was at an early hour of the morning, a very early hour indeed, not yet half-past five — and, as the astronomical reader well knows, the sun in the month of September begins to show that laziness which creeps over him in his declining days, and does not rise so early by an hour or two as he does in his lusty prime — when Mr. Morton crossed the bridge at Mallington on foot, with a double-barrelled gun under his arm, and a game-bag over his shoulder. There were few people stirring in the village at that hour, with the exception of a labouring man or two walking away to his daily toil; but whoever saw the young gentleman, and marked his attire, naturally concluded that he was going out to shoot, and yet several of them noticed as they passed that he had no dog with him, which excited some surprise, as he had no establishment of keepers in the neighbourhood, and was, consequently, they concluded, not likely to be supplied by the way. Perhaps these remarks would not have been made in any other place than Mallington, but it unfortunately happened that during the last few years almost all the peasantry had acquired both a taste for, and a practical knowledge of, the pleasures of the chase,

and viewed everything referring to sporting with the eye of a connoisseur.

Mr. Morton, however, took his way onward with a quick step, entered Mallington Park, and crossed it by a path which, making an angle of forty-five degrees both with the river and the road to the house, passed behind the latter at some distance from it, and wound away through some of the wildest parts of the domain. In that direction lay the favourite haunt of the deer, who seldom came down into the more trim and decorated part of the park near the river, except to drink in the cool moonlight; and here, to the shady groves and clumps of beech, and elm, and oak, succeeded a wide tract of tall fern or short dry grass, sprinkled over with numerous hawthorns, while here and there appeared a solitary chesnut tree of immense girth, spreading out its long limbs wide enough to cover a whole herd. The sun had risen, it is true, but was not yet high enough to overtop the neighbouring woods and hills; and though the sky was full of light, the dew of the preceding evening lay thick and white upon the grass like a hoar frost, or hung upon every thread of the spider's web, like a tairy net-work, strung with gems. The park was quite still and solitary, as far as the human race was concerned, but not so in regard to the wild creatures, who, following the warning voice of nature, wake up to the enjoyment or to the strife of the day with the first ray of the rising sun. The tall deer were already standing in herds, or stretching their long slender limbs amongst the fern, and on a broken sandy part of the ground innumerable rabbits were hopping about, till, startled by Morton's approaching foot, they bustled away into their burrows, terrified at the sight of the great general oppressor man. Wild birds of various kinds, too, were seen, either in the air, on the ground, or amongst the branches. A hawk hovered over head, watching for his prey; a glistening cock pheasant started from beneath a low holly bush, as the young gentleman brushed it in passing; a hen partridge trotted off with her young covey, without thinking fit to take wing; and a curlew, with its long wings, swept away towards the wilder and more barren country beyond the park. Morton, however, showed no inclination to begin the

warfare so soon, and walked quietly on, with his gun still under his arm, till he reached the park paling on the side next to the heath, and had crossed the tall stile leading to the sandy road on the other side. There, however, he paused, and charged both barrels, examining the flints, for percussion caps had not been then invented, and taking care that the priming was well and orderly disposed in the pan. This being done, he walked across the heath in the direction of a clump of firs upon a little mound, which I think has been already mentioned, and soon perceived, seated on the first rise of the ground, three stout men holding a couple of brace of dogs, with two or three young lads. At their head was Edmonds, the park-keeper; and as soon as Mr. Morton was within about a hundred and fifty yards he advanced to meet him, and spoke a few words in a low tone.

"No, it is not needful," replied Morton; "there is no danger, my good friend. Merely let one of the boys go with me to the wood to show me which is the path mentioned, and I will rejoin you in a few minutes. You would hear my gun, of course, at that distance?"

"Oh yes, Sir," answered Edmonds, "no fear of that, the wind sets this way."

"Then unless you do hear it you need not move," rejoined Morton; "if you do you may as well come to seek me."

While they had been speaking they had walked on towards the trees; and then one of the lads, having been selected from the rest, accompanied the young gentleman to the edge of Wenlock Wood, where the very path entered which had been pursued by Mr. Gibbs on his unfortunate expedition. There Mr. Morton left him, and, bidding him return to the keepers, walked on alone, with his gun resting easily on the inside of his arm so as to be brought forward at any moment without delay. The path, as we have before described it, was sometimes narrow, with the shrubs and young trees standing forward so as scarcely to leave room for two persons to pass abreast, sometimes wide and open where the bushes were low and scattered, either pursuing its direction in a single line, or dividing into two to sweep round some thicker clump of brushwood, or some saplings that had grown up in the

midst of its course. With a slow step, and not without caution, the young gentleman continued to advance, turning a keen and quick eye to the foliage on either side; for so severe and so recent a blow as he had unexpectedly received might well teach him watchfulness against a concealed assailant. He had gone about two hundred yards from the edge of the wood, when he thought he heard some murmuring as of persons speaking low at a little distance in advance, and he paused for a moment to ascertain the fact. All was silent again, however, the next instant, and, thinking he had deceived himself, he walked on with a slow and quiet step. The trees were there close and thick, but a little beyond they opened out into the sort of wild scattered tract of woodland lying at the foot of the high bank to which we have before traced the steps of Alfred Latimer. The brighter light and freer air were just making themselves perceptible, when suddenly the voices were again heard, and Mr. Morton stopped, saying to himself "The letter assured me he would be alone." The next instant, however, it appeared that he had made up his mind to go on, and, proceeding at a quicker pace than before, he was soon in the open ground, where, to his surprise, he beheld the form of Mr. Gibbs himself, busily engaged, as it seemed, in pointing out to Harry Soames, the constable of Mallington, the spot where he had been robbed. He performed the task with all due grace and eloquence, showing the spot where he had been assailed, the way which the plunderer took after depriving him of his property, and the very tree behind which Williams had concealed himself while lying in wait for his coming. The sight of these two personages was by no means agreeable to Mr. Morton, on his present errand, and, wishing not to be interrupted, he was drawing back to give them an opportunity of finishing their perquisitions when the quick eye of the traveller fell upon him as his head and shoulders overtopped the brushwood that lay between.

"Ah, Mr. Morton — Mr. Morton!" exclaimed Gibbs, as he perceived the young gentleman turning away. "We are nobody but friends here. You need not be alarmed, though it is such a murderous sort of place."

"I am not alarmed in the least, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton; "but I was not in search of society at present."

Mr. Gibbs, however, would not take the hint, replying with a knowing smirk, "In search of feathered bipeds, I presume. I was just pointing out to the good constable here the place where I was knocked down and robbed, for I can't help thinking that those fellows must have a rendezvous somewhere hereabouts."

"Not all improbable," replied Morton in a dry and discouraging tone. "The place looks very well fitted for such a purpose."

"Oh, I'm quite sure of it," rejoined Mr. Gibbs, not to be stopped, "for, with my glass, I saw Jack Williams walk up to the edge of the wood yesterday afternoon, and Bill Maltby follow with another man about half an hour after. I knew the one by his walk, and the other by the switching of his stick, and so we came up so early just to see if they had left any traces behind them."

"Have you discovered anything?" demanded Morton.

"No, Sir," replied the constable, fixing his two hawk-like eyes upon him; "but I think we shall before we 've done."

"Well, I wish you success," said the young gentleman, and walked on for about a quarter of a mile through the wood. He then returned, thinking that in all probability the traveller and his companion would have abandoned the pursuit by that time, but he found them seated on the stump of a tree very near the spot where he had left them, discussing some viands which Mr. Gibbs had taken care to bring with him in a pocket handkerchief, and, merely bowing his head in answer to their salutation, he walked on along the path, and, rejoining the keepers on the common, shot his way back through the fields on the other side of Mallington Park.

Mrs. Charlton's larder was well stored with game that afternoon, but we will not tire the reader by the description of Mr. Morton's exploits in the field, or of the game-keepers' admiration of the coolness and precision of his aim. On the contrary, returning to the worthy traveller and his companion, Harry Soames,

we must take some notice of their conversation after Morton passed them a second time.

"I wonder who that fellow is," said the constable in a meditative tone.

"I dare say you do!" answerod Mr. Gibbs with a shrewd smile.

"What makes you say that in that sort of way, Mr. Gibbs?" rejoined the constable. "It was just as if you would have said 'I could tell if I liked.'"

"Oh dear, no!" answered the traveller; "I didn't say anything like it. I only said I dared say you would, because nobody seems to know, and everybody 's curious."

"Well, I doubt that he 's after any good," observed Mr. Soames.

"Poo, nonsense," said Gibbs, "What harm can he be about?"

"Why, I don't know; a good deal, perhaps," replied the constable. "Didn't you see that when he caught sight of us he was for turning back, and then he only walked a little bit further and came round again. What should bring him up here at this hour of the morning?"

"Ay, that I can't say," was Mr. Gibbs's reply. "He might have business, you know."

"Ay, pretty business, up here before six o'clock," answered the constable. "I 'll thank you for a bit more of that ham, Mr. Gibbs."

"Why, he might say the same of us," observed the traveller, presenting his companion with a slice of ham on the end of his knife.

"That 's quite a different affair," answered Harry Soames, in the intervals of mastication. "In the first place, I 'm an officer, and have business everywhere. Then you told him what we were about at once, but he took care not to say a word of what he was after."

"Poo, it 's all nonsense," replied Mr. Gibbs, "I 've good reason to believe that he 's quite a gentleman."

"Ay, ay, because he 's bought some of your d—d stuff, I 'll

warrant you," rejoined the constable; "but let me tell you, Mr. Gibbs, that many a rascally clerk passes for a gentleman when he comes down to the country, after having cheated his employers, as long as he 's got any of their money to spend."

"You know nothing about the matter," answered Gibbs, in an offended tone, "and I know what I know. Mr. Morton 's a gentleman and a man of property — I 'm sure of that. Don't you see what a friend he 's of Dr. Western's?"

"That 's nothing to do with it," replied Soames; "for I can tell you one thing, Mr. Gibbs, and that is, there isn't a man more easily done in all England than the good doctor. I 'm not the only one, I can tell you, that fancies there 's something odd. One-half of the people of Mallington have their doubts; and it 's only two days ago that a magistrate, who has as much cunning in his little finger as Dr. Western in his whole body, told me to keep an eye quietly upon a certain gentleman, because he had had information, though not on oath, that he isn't what he pretends to be, and that though he gives hints of his being a great person, yet he may turn out a very little one. Hark! there goes a gun — both barrels, by Jupiter! — I 'll bet you a pound he 's poaching Mallington manor. He 'd better not let Edmonds catch him, I can tell him that, for he 's not one to stand nonsense."

What further reply Mr. Gibbs might have made, on the spur of the occasion, to his companion's suspicions of Mr. Morton, was interrupted by the incident of the report they both heard; but still, although the worthy traveller believed that he had excellent reasons for supposing that gentleman to be a person of high respectability, yet such is the nature of calumny, that when adroitly put and pertinaciously supported, it still leaves a shade of suspicion even on the minds of people who have many good reasons for knowing its falsity. Mr. Gibbs began to think that Morton's conduct, especially that morning, was somewhat odd, and to ask himself if he might not be deceived — nay, if he might not have aided to deceive himself. He would not give up the young gentleman's cause so easily, however, and, after a few minutes' cogitation, replied, "I dare say you would find, now, that Edmonds has given him leave to shoot for a day."

"I don't know," answered the constable, "but one thing I certainly shall do, and that is to tell him that some one has been up here with a gun, and who it was."

"That you can do, if you like," replied Mr. Gibbs; "but I should think that poor fellow Edmonds was in no way to take notice of such things."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the constable, "one would think you were lackadaisical, Mr. Gibbs. Why, the girl has been gone a week last Tuesday, and he has had plenty of time to get over it. People do all manner of things the first day or two, but they soon learn that what can't be cured must be endured."

"Well, I should think that Edmonds was a man not easy to teach that in his daughter's case," answered Mr. Gibbs, who was, in truth, a man of some feeling himself, and what is even more rare, of some pertinacity of feeling. "I should think he was one to brood over it for ever!"

"Not he," cried Harry Soames, with a laugh; "why, I 've seen him twenty times this week just going about his business as if nothing had happened; and one day when I stopped him to tell him all I had done to find Miss Lucy and Master Alfred, he cut me as short as Miss Martin cuts a yard of ribbon, saying, 'You need not give yourself the trouble, Soames. I wish to hear nothing about it,' and so he walked off, and began to order the people about rolling the lawn, as if nothing were the matter in life."

"Well, it is very odd," said Mr. Gibbs; "I couldn't lose a daughter so — but there go the guns again."

"Ay, I bet there will be a fine large basket go to London by the night coach," observed the constable; "but come, Mr. Gibbs, let us be wagging. It 's not my business to watch poachers, or I would have that fellow up. He 'll be caught out some day, however, and that you 'll live to see if you stay at Mallington long enough."

"I shall stay till I have seen the end of this thread," replied the traveller, "if I set up a shop on my own account. However, I have a fortnight's leave yet to come and go upon, and Mr. Prior said he would come down again in a week."

"And what can he do more than I can?" asked the constable, who did not all approve the admiration which Mr. Gibbs had more

than once expressed of the thief-taking powers of the Bow-street officer. "Those Londoners make a great piece of work, but they can do no more than their neighbours."

"I don't know," answered Gibbs; and without further observation followed his companion back to Mallington.

CHAPTER XLIII.

In the course of human life, as society is now organised, with all its wheels and springs and mechanical contrivances for rendering everything regular, and securing precision in all affairs, there are certain moments of recurring interest, varying in every town, and perhaps in every family, when some particular event occurs each day, breaking the monotony of ordinary existence, and affording a brief space of bustle and activity to thoughts which otherwise might go on sleeping like dormice for long months at a time. One of these moments, in almost every house in the land, is that of the post's arrival; when those little mysterious packets of white paper and black strokes call up in the breasts of those to whom they are delivered a thousand imaginations of that which is within. And what, indeed, may not be under that seal? What strange, what sad, what joyful revolutions of feeling may not one glance of the interior produce? Where is the fancy so dull and heavy — where the heart so apathetic as no eagerly to forestall the intelligence, even while the fingers are breaking the wax, and fly through all the mazes of probability, even though certainty is close at hand.

As the reader already knows, or ought to know — for we have already told him in a preceding part of this tale to which he may have occasion to refer more than once hereafter, and, therefore, if we have forgotten it, or passed over it as an incident of no consequence, he is very much in fault, every incident herein mentioned having its due bearing and relevant connexion with all the rest, and with the end of all — the post came into Mallington in the middle of the night. Nevertheless, according to the system of those days, when slow and sure and dear and good were the maxims of locomotion and commerce, instead of quick and

hazardous, cheap and nasty, the great principles of the present time — the letters were not delivered, at least at the further end of Mallington, till between nine and ten; the address of every despatch being carefully examined by the postmaster, and the whole sorted and re-sorted with a deliberate slowness, which greatly retarded the process, but insured perfect regularity as the result. Thus, at Mallington House the urn was hissing on the table, Mrs. Charlton was putting in the tea, the coffee-pot and eggs were in expectation, the partridge pie upon the sideboard was uncut, and Morton was bending slightly over the table to speak some light and casual words to Louisa, with a tone and a smile that gave them meaning to her ear — for they took very little pains to hide the feelings of their hearts from Mrs. Charlton — when in came the butler, and put down three letters to the lady of the house and two to Mr. Morton. There were newspapers besides; but the letters were looked at first, after due apology; and those received by Mrs. Charlton certainly did not seem to be of a very pleasant nature from the effect they produced on her countenance. The two which came to her guest were of very different shapes and qualities. One was a large and voluminous packet, costing an immense sum of postage, for Rowland Hill was not then in operation. The second was a smaller epistle, and by no means displaying the neat and tidy exactness which characterised the other, either in folding, sealing, or address. It was a shabby-looking concern, with the name of the gentleman for whom it was intended written in the right-hand corner, Mallington House in the left, and Mallington underneath, in a most unsymmetrical and anomalous position. The seal was a broad patch of wax pressed down by a spade guinea, and the paper of that peculiar quality which is dealt out in single sheets at a hundred per cent. profit by the keepers of chandlers' shops at a penny a sheet to maid servants who wish to write love letters.

As Morton, however, had received a similar letter three days before, and divined whence it came, he opened it first, when his eye was greeted with the following communication: —

"Sir — You behaved like a gentleman and a man of honour this morning, for I saw all that went on, though nobody saw me.

So, if you like to come up into Mallington Park about eight o'clock to-night, we 'll talk about the papers, which are quite safe, and I think I can get them for you. I don't ask you to come to the same place, because I think you might not like it at that hour of the night; but I 'll be down in the park at that time, somewhere near the rabbit warren at the back of the house. If you 'll stand out from the trees I shall see you, and I know you are too much of a gentleman to take advantage. You 'll be quite safe yourself, for that I pledge my honour."

No name was signed, and after having read the letter Morton put it in his pocket and opened the other epistle. The cover contained various papers, apparently from the hands of a lawyer, and as Mrs. Charlton quietly glanced her eye across she saw sufficient to make her divine that it was a power of attorney. Within the whole was a small note upon neat paper, written in a nice clean business-like hand, to the following effect: —

"My Dear Young Friend,

"Allow me to call you so, and to thank you for your invitation. The partridges must wait if they will, and fly away if they won't, for I am tied to London till October. Then, by your good leave, I 'll see if I cannot bring down some of the pheasants, with their long tails behind them. If ifs and ands were pots and pans we could do without the paper, as you say; but the law knows no such thing as an if. It is a positive science, my dear Sir, and very positive indeed in its way. It will have all the proofs it can lay hold of; and, though too much pudding may choke a dog, the gullet of the law is much more capacious, and though occasionally it may strain at a gnat, is more frequently inclined to swallow a camel. Get the paper if you can, however, but don't give too much for it, as though it forms a link, it is but a small one; and we can prove the death by other means, though expensive ones, I fear. However, it is just as well to bring over an Italian priest and an English consul as to bribe a British thief too high. Don't walk upon commons too late any more; for your head, I think, must show you by this time that a pitcher never goes so often to the well but it comes home broken at last. I will

send you down a clerk in the course of to-morrow to take your signatures to the papers enclosed when you have looked over them, and, in the mean time, you will believe me,

"Your faithful servant,

"T. QUATTERLY."

"P. S. The clerk I send is a great scamp, so do not trust him with money. I keep him to look after insolvents and fraudulent bankrupts. Set a thief to catch a thief.

"T. Q."

Mr. Morton made no other comment upon his letters but by a smile, and put them in his pocket, but Mrs. Charlton was evidently disturbed with the contents of hers for the rest of the day, and passed a part of the afternoon writing letters. The same evening's post carried away from Mallington three neatly-written, beautifully-folded, and exactly, sealed notes, addressed to "Messrs. — and —, jewellers, New Bond-street;" "Mrs. —, dealer in British and Foreign lace, Conduit-street;" and Messrs. —, silk mercers, &c., Piccadilly."

Mrs. Windsor looked at them all with carefull attention, and observed, in a murmuring tone to herself, "It won't do much longer, Ma'am, I can tell you. You 'll have to play your trump, or you 'll lose the odd trick. I wonder what she can be waiting for. I should think the pear was quite ripe."

When the letters were written a load seemed taken off Mrs. Charlton's mind; and after having left Louisa and Mr. Morton alone together during the whole afternoon, she appeared at dinner all smiles and gracefulness. It is a pity that she had grown a little too stout, otherwise she was certainly a very fascinating woman. After dinner, however, Morton announced that he had a little business to transact, but would be back shortly; and, going to his room, he furnished his pockets with a brace of pistols, and proceeded towards the rendezvous which had been given him by letter as we have seen. The streets of Mallington were usually more full of people at that hour than during the day, for they were an active and industrious race of beings, as the reader may have

observed; and when they had done their own business, they were sure to occupy themselves with other persons'. Taking little heed of whom he met, or what faces gazed at him from the shop doors, the young gentleman walked down the hill, crossed the bridge, and at once obtained admission by the gates into Mallington Park. Then, leaving the keeper's house and the hall to the left, he followed nearly the same course which he had pursued on his shooting excursion two days before, and was soon on the spot where he had seen the rabbits. He there paused and gazed around him, but it was now quite dark, no moon up, and the sky somewhat cloudy. The tall trees falling into thick masses, indeed, could be seen sweeping round through the dim night air, but there was no more light left than to show the grander objects at a distance, and to transform the smaller ones into strange shapes as fancy lent them form and members. Under one of the old hawthorn-trees Morton at first fancied that he saw a man seated, but presently he remembered having perceived the withered stump of an old tree in that direction under the shadow of a younger one. Then, again, he thought that he perceived a figure moving in the tall fern, but recollecting that it was the great haunt of the deer, he concluded that what he beheld was some watchful buck keeping guard over his companions; and going a little further forward into the open space, after having waited about three minutes, he asked aloud if any one was there.

The moment after he heard a slight rustle amongst the thicker trees, and then clearly distinguished a human form advancing with a quick step towards him. Morton kept his position, however, examining the stranger as he approached, and gaining every instant a stronger and stronger conviction that it was no other than Jack Williams, who had given him such serviceable assistance on the common. In a few minutes the man was by his side, and, without any attempt at concealment, addressed him at once with "Good evening, Mr. Morton; you walk late, Sir."

"So do you, it seems," replied Morton; "but business brings me here, as it brought me to the common when first I saw you." He paused, and as Williams made no immediate reply,

added, "When I found you here, Mr. Williams, I imagined that your coming had some reference to the business I allude to."

"Perhaps it has," answered the sailor, and then he stopped and seemed to hesitate.

Morton was not altogether pleased with this conduct, and although from the manner in which the man had aided him when injured and bleeding on Mallington-common, the frank confidence with which he had accompanied him to Mrs. Charlton's house, and the apparently sincere expressions of regret for the event which he had used on that occasion, Morton had believed the suspicions of the Bow-street officer to be totally unfounded, he now could not help supposing that Williams had had some share in the outrage, if he had not actually committed it. "Well," he said, "I am here to communicate with any person regarding the recovery of my property — property which is valuable to me, though of no use to the persons who have taken it, and if you can give me such information as will enable me to regain it I am willing to reward you handsomely for the service rendered."

"We will see about that, Sir," answered Williams, "but there are first one or two things to be settled. It 's better that principals should deal together. Now, if I tell you who has got your pocket-book, and all it contains, will you give me your word of honour, as a gentleman, that you will never proceed against him by the law for taking it?"

"No," replied Morton at once; "I will not give you any such pledge, as it is undoubtedly my intention if he refuses to give it up to proceed against him, and punish him with the utmost severity. However, I will give you my word of honour that if he does give it up I will take no steps against him of any kind, either for taking it or any other part of the affair."

"That won't do, Sir," answered Williams, in a determined but not uncivil tone; "and I 'll show you why. You and he might not be able to agree about terms; then the information I gave you might put his neck in a halter, so that you would have all the advantage in driving the bargain."

"I understand what you mean," replied Morton; "but it is not at all my object, believe me, to gain the advantage you men-

tion; and I am quite willing to pledge my honour that I will use the information you give me in no way whatever against him. If, as you say, we cannot agree about terms, I will tell you what my course will be. To send once more for a Bow-street officer, and, upon the information already obtained direct him to apprehend all such persons as he may have just cause to suspect, but I will furnish him with no new information which I may have obtained from you or through your means. The case shall stand exactly upon the same ground on which it stood before our meeting. If that will suit you well and good; if not, we had better converse no more upon the subject for my mind is made up, and I can promise nothing further."

"That is all I meant," replied Williams; "I meant that we should start fair, and that when I have told who the man is that has got your pocket-book, and given you the means of communicating with him directly you shouldn't be able to turn round upon him and say. 'Now I know who you are, if you don't do just as I like I 'll hang you.' I have your word of honour, then?"

"You have," replied Morton; "but I can't help saying you seem to trust very confidently to the word of a man you don't know."

"Oh, I 'm not often mistaken," replied Williams; "a real gentleman 's just as soon found out as a real rogue, and I 'm not at all afraid about you — But now for it. You want to hear who has got your papers — I have, Sir."

"I am very sorry to hear it," replied Morton in a grave and serious tone.

"Ay! and why should you be sorry?" asked Williams, very much struck with the young gentleman's manner.

"Because," replied Morton; "I thought better of you — because I have deceived myself in regard to your character, and, from your whole demeanour and conduct, assured Prior, the officer, that you had nothing to do with the assault upon me, or the robbery which was afterwards committed."

"You were quite right, Sir; and, for once in this world, a gentleman has done me justice," replied Williams, in a tone of deep feeling. "If every one had judged so from the beginning I

should not have done half the bad things I have done. Nevertheless, knocking you down, and taking your money, or your pocket-book, is not against me on the ship's books. I did neither the one nor the other; and I would have stopped it all if I had come up in time. The pocket-book came into my hands by accident, but having got it, I think I 've a right to drive a bargain about giving it back again."

"I should have imagined," replied Morton, "that a man who shows so much good feeling upon some points as you do would have been rather inclined to restore it to its owner, when you knew who he was, and to trust to his gratitude for recompense."

"Poo, trust to any one's gratitude!" said Williams, with a scoff; "that will never do. However, I meant to have given it back to you, but for circumstances. But the truth is, Sir, I 've got things to do which will make or mar me, and I must have five hundred pounds."

"Then am I to consider," asked Morton, "that such is the price you put upon the papers in your possession?"

"Yes, Sir," replied Williams. "I know their value to you, as well as you do, and they are worth that."

"You must know their value better than I do," answered the young gentleman, lightly, "if you put such a price upon them, for certainly I will not give it."

"Then, d—n me if I do not burn them!" cried Williams, more irritated by the half laughing tone in which Mr. Morton spoke than by his mere refusal to grant such an exorbitant demand.

"In that you 'll act as you think fit," replied Morton; "but of this be assured, that the papers are not of the value to me you suppose. I have means of proving the facts to which they refer, which may, indeed, cost a certain sum, but not near so much as you require; and I am not at all disposed to pay largely for the recovery of papers taken from me by a gross act of violence, when I can do without them, though their loss may entail some trouble and expense."

The man muttered a curse of angry disappointment, but made no direct reply, and, after having waited for a minute or two in expectation of some answer, Morton proceeded to say, "You will

probably think better of this, and I give you till to-morrow night to consider of it; warning you that the expense likely to be created by the loss of these papers, as calculated by my solicitor, is about two hundred pounds, and, consequently, that your modified demand, whatever it may be, must be within that sum. You can let me hear your determination before to-morrow night, after which it will be too late to make any change."

"D—n me, if I don't burn them," was Williams's only reply, and Morton, bidding him good night, turned and walked away.

He passed through the thicker trees; and entered upon the open space beyond, at the back of Mallington Hall, thinking, as he walked on, that he heard the sound of a heavy fall, as if something had dropped from one of the beeches by the way; as he came upon the little rising ground which commanded the greater part of the park, the glistening waters of the stream could just be seen over the woody ground in the bottom, affording a bright background to the slope below him. From every other point, so great was the darkness of the night, no moving object could have been distinguished; bu: there, thrown out by the shining of the river, Morton, to his surprise, beheld the figure of a man running quickly down the hill in the direction of the Park gates.

CHAPTER XLIV.

IMAGINATION is a great and wonderful endowment. By it the powers of conception are extended first from the actual to the probable, and then from the probable to the possible. Without it no great discovery probably would ever have been made, unless by the mere effect of accident; without it few of the fine or noble enterprises which chequer the dull plodding of earth's ordinary course with spots of light would ever be undertaken; without it the brightness of everything that is fine and beautiful would fade away into the leaden greyness of hard reality. It is, in fact, the light of life; and as the material world without the rays which bring its loveliness to the sense of the eye could only be felt in its harsh outline, so to the world of the mind all that exists would lose its colouring and its splendour, and sink into mere stern tangible

forms, but for imagination. Yet there may be too much light; there may be lights that dazzle, lights that deceive; and that portion which serves not to illustrate acts to blind. Thus with imagination, too; unless duly regulated, it operates but in rendering indistinct, confused, and uncertain the moral vision; sometimes deceiving, sometimes blinding the eye that is opened to too broad a glare. Such is the case most frequently and most fatally in regard to the expectations of ever-aspiring man. These are almost always exorbitant, and when indulged in, are full of fearful disappointments, leading not unfrequently to reckless folly, vice, and crime. By the natural transition of which we have spoken—from the actual to the probable, and from the probable to the possible, imagination gives us the power of conceiving not only all that is, but all that may be, and if we stopped there, no harm would ensue. On the contrary, however, vanity, desire, hope, and every human passion misleads us into confounding the various modes or forms of our own conceptions — leads us to imagine that that which is likely is sure, and that which is possible is likely. When we have discovered our mistake we will not admit that it originated in our own folly or our own fault — we do not blame ourselves for neglecting to put imagination under the guidance of judgment, and we are angry with fate because it won't conform to the schemes we have laid out, or with our fellow men because they have disappointed expectations which an unrestrained imagination led passion unreasonably to entertain.

Such was the case with the man Williams, as he stood upon the spot where Morton had left him after having refused his demand. He muttered curses, he framed a thousand fierce and rash plans, and he thought alone of avenging himself upon others for a disappointment which nothing but fancy had taught him to entertain. In the pocket-book which had fallen into his possession he had discovered papers which he had immediately perceived must be very important to the owner. He had instantly fixed an imaginary value upon them, and had not enterained the slightest doubt of obtaining the sum that he desired. He had gone on in his own mind to employ that sum in the execution of schemes he had long entertained, of which some indications have been already

given in the course of this tale. He had buoyed himself up with hopes, and delighted in prospects which were all founded on the vain supposition that Morton would immediately accede to his demand. Those hopes and prospects, it must be acknowledged, were in themselves criminal. It was no scheme of a calm and tranquil life — of honest industry and domestic peace — that he laid out before him; it was no expectation, even of a relief from labour, or of a mitigation from toil that he entertained as a consequence of obtaining a large sum by not very honest means. It was a life of enterprise and exertion that he pictured to himself — of strife, and danger, and excitement, as a rover of the seas. There were, it is true, to be moments of calm repose, hours of dalliance and passion, scenes of soft enjoyment and luxurious ease, interspersed with the fierce energy of a pirate's life. But the great object and end was freedom from all restraint, the active exercise of a strong and turbulent will, the constant stimulus of peril and adventure. It must be said — not exactly in his justification, for justification there is none, but in order to put the matter before the reader exactly as it presented itself to his mind — that as habit is as powerful over thought as over action, he did not at all consider the course he proposed to himself as criminal. He had in his ship, when in the Mediterranean, seen others following the same life, and he had worked himself up to believe that any individual who chose to run the risk had as much right to declare war against the whole human race as a king against a neighbouring state. He acknowledged no morality in the restraints of society. Those which he voluntarily imposed upon himself he was willing to abide by; and made it a point of honour to do so; but those laws which he had no share in framing, and which others had constructed for the general security, he would not admit to be binding upon him in any degree. I pause upon this character and upon this train of reasoning because, under their various modifications, they are much more common than is generally imagined; and I do not think it is too much to say that one half of the crimes and vices of the world are justified in the eyes of those who perpetrate them by some such misconception of the moral obligation of the social bond. The more I have looked into it, the more I have conversed

with and examined the characters of the criminal and the vicious—and I have done so a great deal for the purpose of ascertaining whether they acted upon mere impulse, or were influenced by any principles, and what — I have always found cause to believe that, though passion has been the prompter, there has still been a delusion going on in the mind, and holding up a shield between themselves and conscience, whose shaft could not fail to touch their heart, if it were left naked and undefended by sophistry.

In the case of Williams, however, it was natural that, as the objects proposed were criminal, and the means of attaining them, which, as the most easy and least perilous, he had first employed, were anything but honest and just, his disappointment should lead him to meditate still more dark and violent means of effecting the same purpose; and one of his first exclamations, after venting many a bitter imprecation, was "By —! I will have the money, one way or another! I will not be baulked and kept here for months, or perhaps shut up in prison, for fear of striking a good stroke. I did not wish to stir up these people here, or to fish in troubled waters among these dull plodding shop-keeping people of England; but now they shall find what I can do;" and, with his eyes bent down in meditation, he turned away and walked towards the further corner of the park, near which, as before described, a stile led over the wall to a spot where some cottages had been built beyond. His step was quick and irregular, in accordance with the irritable impatience that he felt, and the rapid footfalls caught the ear of some persons actually within the wall of the park, for some one exclaimed as he came near "It must be he, though he 's devilish quick back;" and at the same moment the speaker advanced to meet him, adding, "Is that you, Mr. Williams? — have you got it?"

"No, not a farthing, Bill," answered Williams; "and hang me if I don't go home and burn them all; for he shan't have them now if he would give a thousand for them;" and he added a bitter oath.

"That 's unlucky, upon my life," added Bill Maltby, "and you wanted to go as soon as possible, too. Couldn't you and he make a deal of it?"

"No, by —!" replied Williams; "he thinks to get them for nothing; but he 'll find himself devilish much mistaken — Go! to be sure I want to go!" he continued, pursuing in a rambling manner the subjects suggested by what his companion said; "but I 'll make a sweep before I go, however; and once I 'm at Portsmouth or Plymouth they may hunt long enough before they find me."

"Don't you think," inquired Bill Maltby, in a suggestive kind of manner, "that if you keep about this place long you may have Prior, or some more unpleasant customers still, down here looking after you? Prior has got some notions like a gentleman; but the greater part of these fellows are rough 'uns. I think if I were you I 'd be off to-morrow morning."

"Not unless there 's something to be done to-night," answered Williams, doggedly; "I will not go without the money I want — Besides," he added, after a moment's consideration, "there 's no such hurry. He said he would give me till to-morrow night to consider of it; and I can keep him in play about the papers for two or three days more. But I 'm resolved to have what I want, any way — Hark ye, Bill, was that Brown you were speaking to?"

"Yes," answered Bill Maltby; "he 's a little in the wind, and wouldn't budge, though I told him it was you."

"All the better," answered Williams. "You were talking to me the other day about a lot of things up at the Hall. I 've a great mind to try it to night."

"We had better wait till it 's daylight," said Bill Maltby, in a low tone; "then we could contrive to get the two women out of the way, and slip in without any breaking. I know quite well the room where it is all kept. We could hand it out of the window one to the other, and if we were caught it would make a difference, you know."

"I see no difference at all," replied Williams sharply.

"Oh, but it would at a trial," answered Bill Maltby. "It makes all the difference in life. If you break through a door and only take a silver spoon you 're pretty sure to tighten your cravat; but if you slip in and take a thousand pounds you get off for a taste of Botany."

The fact is, that in vice, as in virtue — in baseness, as in excellence — there are numerous steps and grades. We go climbing or descending the ladder; and though the downward course is the most easy, yet we are still inclined to hesitate at the next step as we gain a nearer sight of those which are below. Bill Maltby had not yet reached the point of burglary, and he feared to put his foot upon that round. He would rather have had an intermediate step; but Williams had no such hesitation, and he replied "I think you 're turning coward, Bill. Ay, and fool too. Are you not quite sure that if we tried it in the day-light we should be stopped in the middle of the work, and only get grabbed for our pains. If we get in to-night the matter 's quite sure. We can lock up the women, and be off at once, so that we can be out of harm's way before any one knows anything about it."

"But suppose we shouldn't find a ship ready to sail?" said Maltby.

"Why, you don't suppose I 'm going to freight a ship?" said Williams. "I 'm not such a fool as that, I can tell you. A boat is the thing, and that can always be hired when one has money. Now, you say there 's plenty of stuff here."

"Oh, ay," answered Bill Maltby, "to the tune of two or three thousand pounds, and a great deal of it in gold cups and such like, which could be easily packed."

"We'll beat it up altogether for that matter," answered Williams; "that 's soon done. Two or three thousand pounds. That 's worth fetching, Bill. Have you got a tool with you?"

"Nothing but a screw-driver," answered Bill Maltby, in a low and faltering voice; for though a share in the plunder tempted him strongly, and though a man ever ready for a scuffle, yet the idea of a new crime which would render the whole of the rest of life insecure, filled him with apprehensions that he could not banish.

"Give it to me," was Williams's only reply; and having received a large turnscrew, which Maltby drew out of his pocket, he ran his hand over it, feeling its thickness and its length, and murmuring to himself "I would rather it had been a crowbar; but this will do. Now, Bill," he said, "we had better set to

work at once; but let us see how we must arrange. That fellow Brown is fit for nothing but hard work. You saw he had nearly spoiled the whole affair with the beak. I 'll take the cracking the darkeners upon myself; then Tom shall come in to help me; and you, who are sharp and quick, shall keep a lookout."

"We shall all go snacks, of course?" said Bill Maltby, who did not like the idea of a smaller share of the plunder.

But Williams turned sharply upon him, replying "Of course! Do you fancy I 'm not a man of honour?"

Alack and a-well-a-day, what a wonderful thing honour is! How it would astonish many a smart man about town to hear thieves and house-breakers talking of honour, which is so often on his own lips; and yet more than one of these men about town, if he were to look into his own heart, would find that at the very time he is most frequently using that sacred word he is continually violating its true sense more than even the scoundrels whom he fancies he despises. Violating it! — ay, in a thousand ways — breaking his word — betraying his friend's confidence — ruining his peace — cheating him on the turf — or swindling him at the gaming-table. Would to Heaven that, under the penalty of transportation and branding in the hand, no men were permitted to use the word honour but those who can prove that they possess it! — for the great difference between the honour that is amongst thieves and the honour of men of fashion is, that the former is maintained towards their friends, the latter only to the eyes of the world. If it were more real, we should have fewer appeals to the pistol's mouth to prove that it exists, for that which is self-evident is never doubted.

To leave our homily, however, Bill Maltby was very well satisfied with Williams's arrangement, for the part therein assigned to himself was decidedly the least perilous, and the most profitable. He calculated that in case of resistance within the house, or discovery from without, he should be easily able to make his escape through the park, and that no proof would exist of his participation in the robbery. Thus he would have all the advantages and none of the risk; and, under this view of the case, he made no further objection to proceeding immediately to business. Ac-

cordingly, Williams and himself walked up to the corner, where Tom Brown had been left, and where he was found sound asleep with his back against the park wall. He was speedily roused, however, and a short conversation, in a low tone, ensued; in the course of which Brown showed that, with all his apparent dulness, he had occasionally a shrewd conception of the dangers and the probabilities of anything that was to be undertaken.

"No, no, Master Williams," he said; "wait a bit — wait a bit. It isn't nine o'clock yet, and Edmonds and the keepers are always on the look out about the park till half past nine or ten. You 'll be sure to have some of them upon you; but if you wait till after ten they 'll be all snug and snoring. The women, too, will then have gone to bed, so you 'll have no piping; and we can sit here under the wall for an hour quite well."

This argument was unanswerable; and taking up a position in which it was impossible for any one to see them without approaching very close, these three very respectable visitors to the park sat down to while away the time till the hour approached for the execution of their scheme.

CHAPTER XLV.

WAITING is always a very unpleasant process. There are recorded instances of persons who have found expectation agreeable, but their internal frame-work must have been of a very peculiar construction; for, to the simple apprehension of a least two-thirds of the world, it must seem that if it be for pleasure that we are forced to wait, the delay must be very tedious; and if it be for pain, the anticipation must be excessively disagreeable. But the act of waiting for the execution of a dangerous and criminal scheme is apt to fill the projector thereof — at least, in many cases — with doubts, hesitations, and fears not very favourable to energetic operations. This, indeed, does not always obtain in every instance, but the effect is modified as usual by the character of the individual. Now, there were three men seated under the wall of Mallington Park, and of those three only one experienced the apprehensive hesitation to which we have referred. Williams

was of too stern and determined a character to be susceptible of its influence, and he remained merely calculating the position of all the doors and windows in Mallington Hall, and endeavouring to settle in his own mind which would give him most easy ingress. Tom Brown was too dull and stolid to suffer imagination to trouble him at all upon such subjects, and he nodded drowsily from time to time, ready to act when it was necessary, but thinking little of the moment that was to come after. Bill Maltby, on the contrary, sat doubting and shrinking within himself, every instant feeling more unwillingness to go forward in the scheme; not from any sense of its criminality, but from those vague, but not less tremendous, phantoms of danger, punishment, and death, which, in the pauses of crime — when neither the spirit of adventure nor the excitement of action carries us through unthinking — come upon the heart of every man engaged in wicked deeds. He contemplated all the chances, he magnified all the dangers. A few minutes before, and he fancied he could secure his own escape, at all events; but now he thought he might very possibly be taken in running away from the spot if they should be interrupted; and then, again, he pictured, by the power of fancy, his apprehension with a part of the plundered property in his possession in case they should be successful. Then came the images of a prison, a court, examination, trial, execution; the pinioning the arms — the solemn procession from the cell — the priestly exhortation — the fatal drop — the gaping multitude — the shivering touch of the cord — the choking agony — the death, and the wide awful misty hereafter! All that he had shut out from thought for years — all that he had neglected or despised — every rejected warning — every inducement to better things cast away — each awful point in the fate and future of the criminal — each anguish of the heart and of the body which follow like hell-hounds upon the course of the guilty were all present to his mind, at once growing into fearful distinctness in the darkness and silence of the hour.

It was a warm September night, but he felt it cold, a shivering sensation crept down his back, and over his limbs, he felt his arms tremble as he rested them, with his hands upon his knees;

he could scarce keep his teeth from chattering in his head. A terrible thing — a very terrible thing is the expectation of crime!

The wind set from the side of Mallington, and though it was so low as scarcely to stir the trees, it at length brought, sweetly sweeping over the stream, the soft and musical tones of the village clock as it struck ten. To the ear of Bill Maltby it sounded like the knell of death, it seemed like the tolling of a funeral bell — it made the blood curdle in his veins. But Williams instantly started up and shook Brown by the shoulder, saying in a low voice, "Now, there 's ten, and that d — d moon's getting up, I can see by the light aloft there. Let us get to work. You, Tom, go round by the path up above over the hill, and meet us just behind the house. I 'll go with Bill and plant him where he can see all round. Come along, Bill."

Whether he doubted his companion's resolution, and determined to keep his eye upon him on the way to their scene of operations, or whether his choosing to accompany the young man was the mere effect of chance, I cannot tell; but they walked on together, Bill Maltby not daring to show his want of firmness; and, certain it is, that Williams, as they went, addressed to him, in a whisper, many a word well calculated, to use one of his own terms, "To hearten him up." He did, indeed, recover in some degree from the effects of his imaginary terrors, as soon as he was once more in activity, but still his nerve was shaken, and ever and anon as they hurried on, through the dark close walks of the wood, he started and looked round as if he fancied that some hand was stretched out to seize him, and when they emerged into the open part of the park where the moonlight was just beginning to lighten the scene, he gazed on with anxious fear, half convinced that he saw the forms of men amongst the bushes, or in the hollows of the ground. His demeanour had not passed without observation by his companion, who, though incapable of dread himself, had seen what it produced in other men too often not to recognise the indications thereof; and if Maltby had looked to William's face, and had been able, by the faint light of that hour, to distinguish its expression, he would have seen a scornful smile curling the corner of his stern lip at what he internally called his pitiful

chicken-heartedness. The sailor made no observation, however; but, keeping as far as possible under the shadow of the trees till they were within about fifty yards of the house, he crossed over suddenly to a wide-spreading elm that stood out clear from the rest near the western angle of the building, and then stopping, pointed down to a spot beneath the branches, saying, "There! stand there; you can see pretty well all round but on the east. Keep your eyes busy and your ears too." He spoke slowly and low; and then added, fixing his eyes firmly upon his companion's face, "If a man quits his post, fails to give warning, or betrays his comrades, we shoot him through the head; and if I should not be here to do it, there are friends of mine who will."

"On my life and soul, Williams," said Maltby; "I will be as steady as a rock. Did I did not first put you up to the thing?"

"Yes," answered Williams; "and then got poltroonish when it was to be done. Look to it — that 's all. You shall have your full share of the booty; but if you flinch you shall have lead instead of silver, by —!"

Thus saying he left him; and Maltby, with mingled shame and indignation — the last not in the least lessened by a knowledge that Williams's charge was just — remained gazing for a moment sullenly upon the ground. He then raised his eyes, and followed with them his companion towards the house, saw him joined by another man, and then marked the shadowy forms of both glide all along that side of the building, seeming to examine every window and door attentively. He himself carried his glance over the whole of that façade; but all was dark and sombre. No light from any casement told that there was waking life within; and except on the eastern side, where the moonlight showed the windows and even the joints of the rough stone, the whole edifice was buried in deep shadow.

Williams was long in making his selection of a point of attack, at least to the nervous anxiety of Bill Maltby it seemed so; and after having neglected for some time the task assigned to him, in watching his companion's movements, the sentinel began to gaze forth over the park. Suddenly, with a start, he heard a loud sound, as of some strong plank riven asunder; and, turning his

eyes quickly towards the house, he could distinguish, though by no means clearly, the two men standing apparently closely together before one of the windows on the ground floor, near the north eastern angle. The window shutters of that story were all external; and Maltby well understood that the operation of breaking in had begun; but the noise terrified and shook him; and he instantly once more cast a hasty glance over the park, as if that sound could have already wakened up servants and keepers. He looked first to the westward, where all was still, and nothing to be seen — not even a deer; but then he gazed to the south, in the direction of Edmonds's house, which was not to be descried, however, being hidden, as before said, by the trees and undulations of the ground. Running his eye along towards the east, his heart began to beat and his limbs to shake, for he thought he saw two or three figures, a long way off, but advancing towards the hall; and raising his hand to his eyes he endeavoured to clear them of all mist, fearful lest the terror that he felt might deceive him. Now, however, he beheld the same objects more distinctly; they were clearly men; and they were coming forward rapidly. At the same moment a shivering crash met his ear, as if one of the panes of the window had been broken; and after an instant's hesitation as to whether he should at once provide for his own safety, or warn his companions, shame prevailed. He saw that the men who were advancing were yet far from the spot. There was time to save all; and, darting across, he seized Williams's arm just as it was throwing up the sash of the window which had been opened from within by thrusting a hand through the broken glass."

"There are people coming!" cried Maltby. "Run, quick — there are people coming, I tell you!"

But Williams was in the fierceness of active exertion, and he replied, casting up the window, "I don't believe it — it 's a lie — you are afraid, and fancy it. Run round, Tom, and look out."

But, ere the words were well uttered, the alarm bell of the hall began to ring; and, snatching up the turnscrew which had fallen down, Williams hurried to the angle and looked round. Tom Brown and Maltby were already many yards towards the wood, but the bolder ruffian stood and gazed forth for an instant

ere he also took flight. Then muttering "It is true, by — !" he passed again into the shadow of the house, cut across the open space towards the trees, and was soon among the wood walks again. The alarm bell still rang out its angry peal as hard as the hands of the two frightened women in Mallington Hall could pull it, and the shouts with which the persons who were coming up sought to convey the comfortable tidings of their approach to the disconsolate damsels within, were also borne to the ear of Williams as he doubled and turned amidst the tortuous paths. Instead of flying in the same direction as his two comrades, who ran towards the common at the back of the park and Wenlock Wood, he made the best of his way to the river, and, as silently as possible, waded in, and then swam over. Passing quickly through the back lanes, he entered Mallington-street by a narrow alley, just above the surgeon's house, and then at a slow pace descended the hill towards the inn. Several persons were still moving about in the village, and one of the first whom Williams met was Mr. Soames, the constable. Nor did he fail to stop and talk with him for a moment or two in a calm and easy tone, saying that he was just going to get a dram before he went to bed. While they were still conversing they were joined by Mr. Crump, who, in a voice of some trepidation, informed the constable that he thought he heard the alarm bell of the hall ringing. He had been just undressing, with his high window open, and was startled by the sound; but he could not quite swear that it was the alarm-bell, as the wind set the other way.

"D—n it! let us go and see," said Williams; and all three hurried down to the bridge and listened. All was now still, however; the bell had ceased its warning tones long before, for Mr. Crump had been somewhat long in getting on his clothes; and, concluding that he had made a mistake, the constable and Williams returned, after waiting near the gates of the park for about five minutes. As they trod their way back, however, the clock struck eleven, and punctual Mrs. Pluckrose had closed her house for the night. Williams was not sorry that such was the case; for he had foreseen that if he entered the inn, to get the draught he had pretended to be seeking, his wet clothes might be more ap-

parent than was agreeable; but he affected some disappointment, and, with an oath at the good landlady for her punctuality, he bade Soames good night, and walked up the hill.

While such had been the proceedings of that very respectable and interesting person Jack Williams, the three keepers, who, with Edmonds at their head, had been out later than usual, having extended their ramble on the other side of the park, where some depredations had been committed the night before, hurried up to the hall, attracted by the sound of the alarm-bell. As they advanced they clearly caught sight of a man's figure crossing towards the wood, and two of the men set off in pursuit as hard as they could run; but the course which Williams had followed deceived them, and it is only necessary to say that their hunt was vain. Edmonds, on the contrary, went straight up to the hall, and rang the door bell; but it was long ere the two terrified women would give him admission — first inquiring who he was, from an upper window; and then afraid to come down lest there should be robbers in the house below. When he was permitted to enter, they both at once informed him, with all the loquacity of wonder and terror, that they had been roused by a loud noise from the lower story, and on looking out on the side whence the sounds seemed to proceed, had seen two men busily engaged in breaking into the house.

With few questions Edmonds proceeded to the spot, the women following at a respectful distance; and there he found the window broken and thrown up, the fastenings of the shutters forced off, and part even of the woodwork shivered. The park-keeper gazed at it in silence for a moment or two, and then returned, locking the door of that room, and of the passage beyond.

"They are gone for to-night, Mrs. Chalk," he said; "but I will leave one of the men with you when they come back; and for the future, do you see, I will sleep up at the hall myself, at least till the house is full of people again, which I hope will not be long first."

The resolution which he thus expressed seemed a very simple one, and such as might well have been expected from a man of his character, but it was the most fatal determination he could have formed.

END OF VOL. I.

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James, G. P. R.

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